1
MAY

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OF THE EARTH™

Chapter 1

Road/Kill

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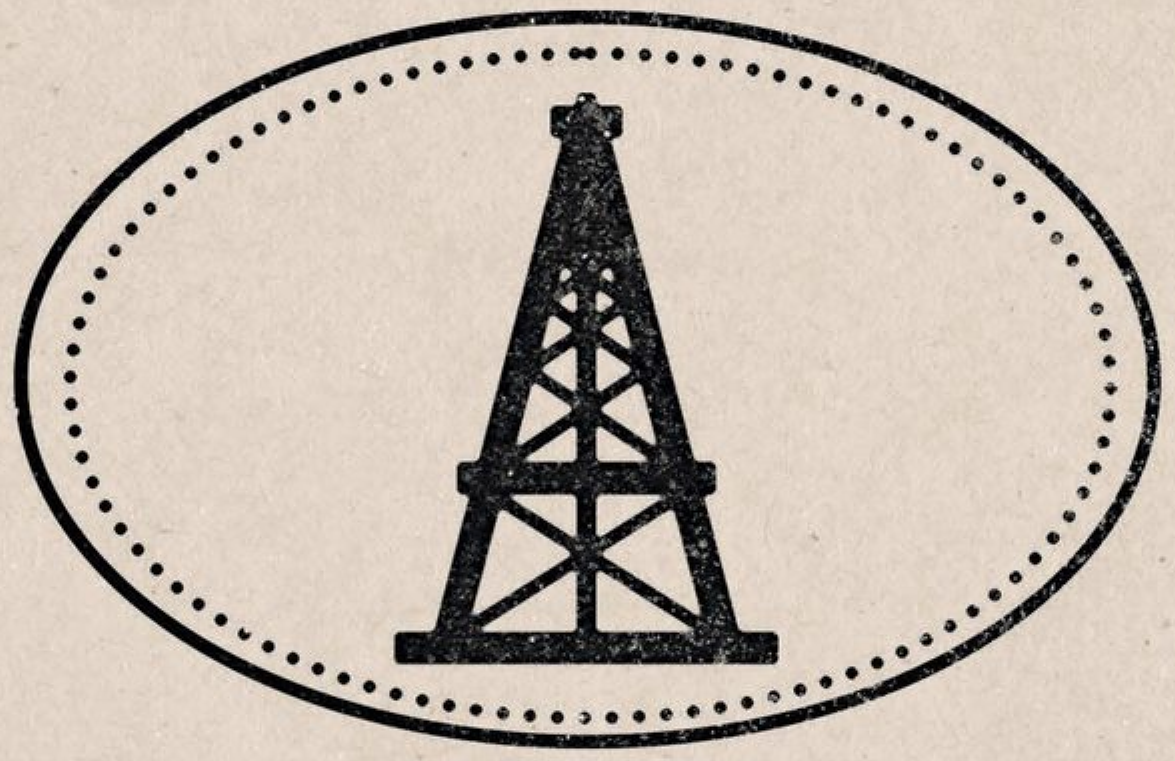
OILFIELD GRAVEYARD



Tales of the Wildcatter Myth

1972

MACHEN UNIVERSITY PRESS, ARKANSAS

CHAPTER ONE

WILDCATTER ORIGINS

THIS BOOK, *Oilfield Graveyard: Tales of the Wildcatter Myth*, follows firmly in the footsteps of my preceding book, *Twenty True Spooky Western Haunts*. Herein lies a thorough examination of a different sort of Western myth, one that has fascinated and terrified roughnecks and their kin for at least seventy-five years, though I have found indications that its history goes well beyond that. It is this strange subject that eventually led to the creation of *Twenty True Spooky Western Haunts*, though it was decided to excise it with this expanded exploration in mind. I had started amassing research on the Wildcatter myth when I first heard of it from an oilman in a Houston, Texas bar in September of 1941. His name was Martin Davis. The way Mr. Davis told it, the Wildcatter myth was an old wives' tale. He had never seen the creature with his own two eyes, but he had collected plenty of its stories.

The first tale Mr. Davis told that sent a cool shiver down my spine concerned an oilman who decided to build a wildcat well on his own property. He drilled down into the crust of the earth but what he found wasn't wealth or power. It was something else entirely. When the authorities arrived on the oilman's ranch in Central Texas, they found the home eerily deserted, breakfast on the table as if waiting for a phantom family that will never arrive. The official line said that the family disappeared and a search began. Nothing was ever found. But a strange oily substance—easily mistakable for crude oil—left in the dirt by the oil well indicated that something strange and unprecedented had occurred—a visit from that horrible subterranean folk creature.

It was this tale that sent me searching for other stories of this American myth. I found more and more as I dug. "Don't dig too deep," one oilman, Robert Kramer, told me with a wry smile, "or the Wildcatter is going to get you. That's what my daddy told me, and I tell it to my son too. The point is: don't fool around with what you don't understand."

I asked Mr. Kramer where he thought the Wildcatter myth originated. "Well," he began. "It started when the oil started, I figure. So I think it's always been here in some shape or size."

He looked away and I wondered if he had more to tell. I did not expect what he said next. "I seen it once. San Antonio. It was a big sucker. Hunched over. It had this face like a skull. I screamed, mister. I screamed like I never screamed before. Convinced myself it wasn't what it was, but I knew. I've always known. That was *it*."

If you wanted to close this book now, I wouldn't blame you. If you think that the word of an old oilman should be taken with a considerable grain of salt, I'd agree with you. But this is a story—varying only in the witness—that I have gone on to record over forty-five times from across multiple states. Something, it seems, is happening. But despite all of these accounts, there still is no photographic evidence and the 'credible witnesses'—policemen, firemen, and public officials—that have had experiences refuse to come forward without anonymity. While I understand the reticence to speak publicly about an experience like this, I believe that staying silent does a grave disservice to those willing to go on the record who risk ridicule from their communities. The more people that chime in with similar stories, the closer we inch toward a time when people might take these claims seriously rather than a harmless lark.

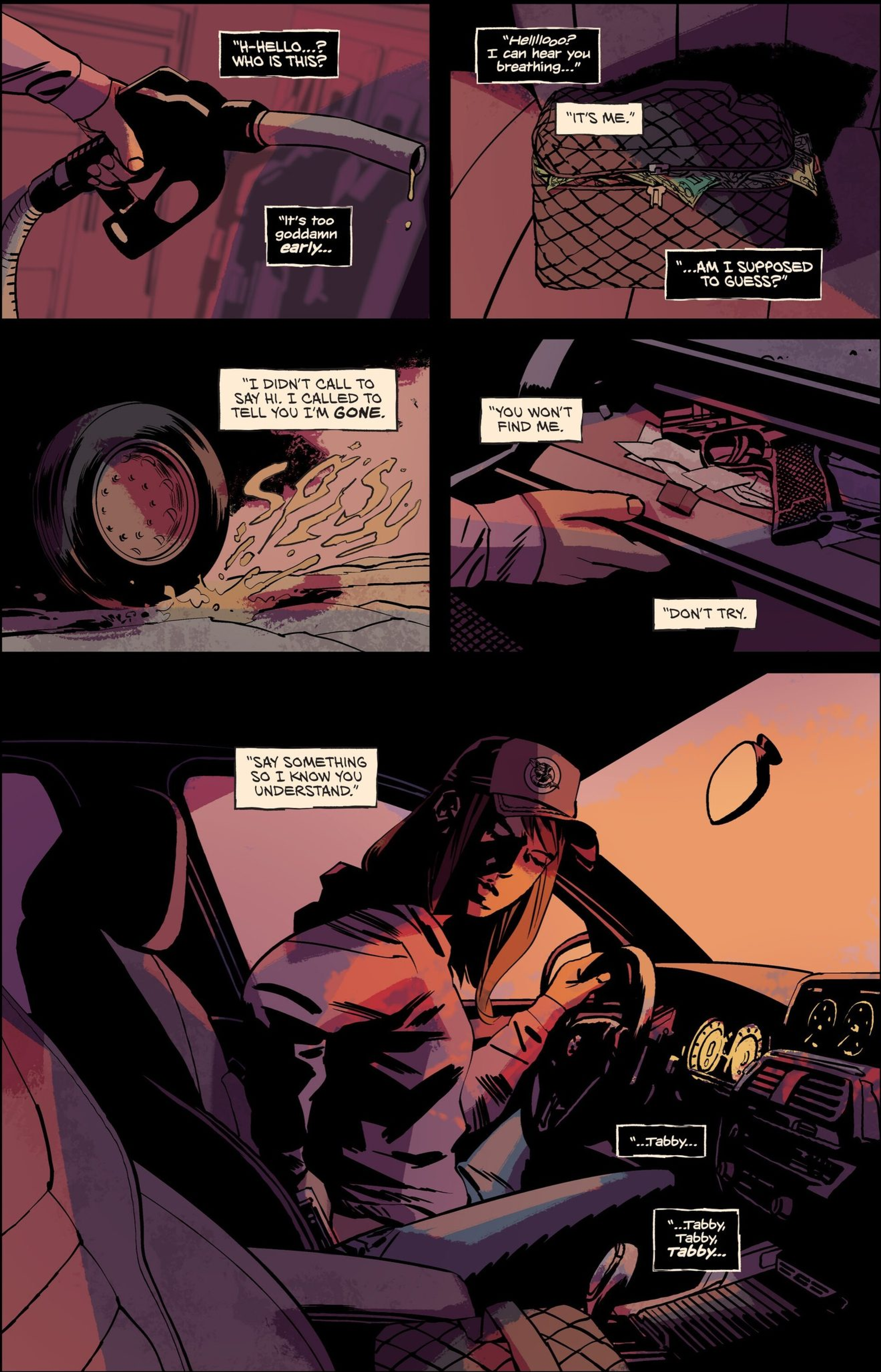
In fact, there is nothing harmless about the Wildcatter myth. I have in my notes at least five occurrences where witnesses were either injured or killed by the mysterious creature. In all of these official investigations, the cause of injury or death has been listed as something innocuous and ordinary; much to the chagrin of those who reported them. My hope is that a book like this might shed light on this terrible miscarriage of justice and will allow communities and organizations a chance to reevaluate their positions, and for its victims to feel victorious, not distrusted and abused.

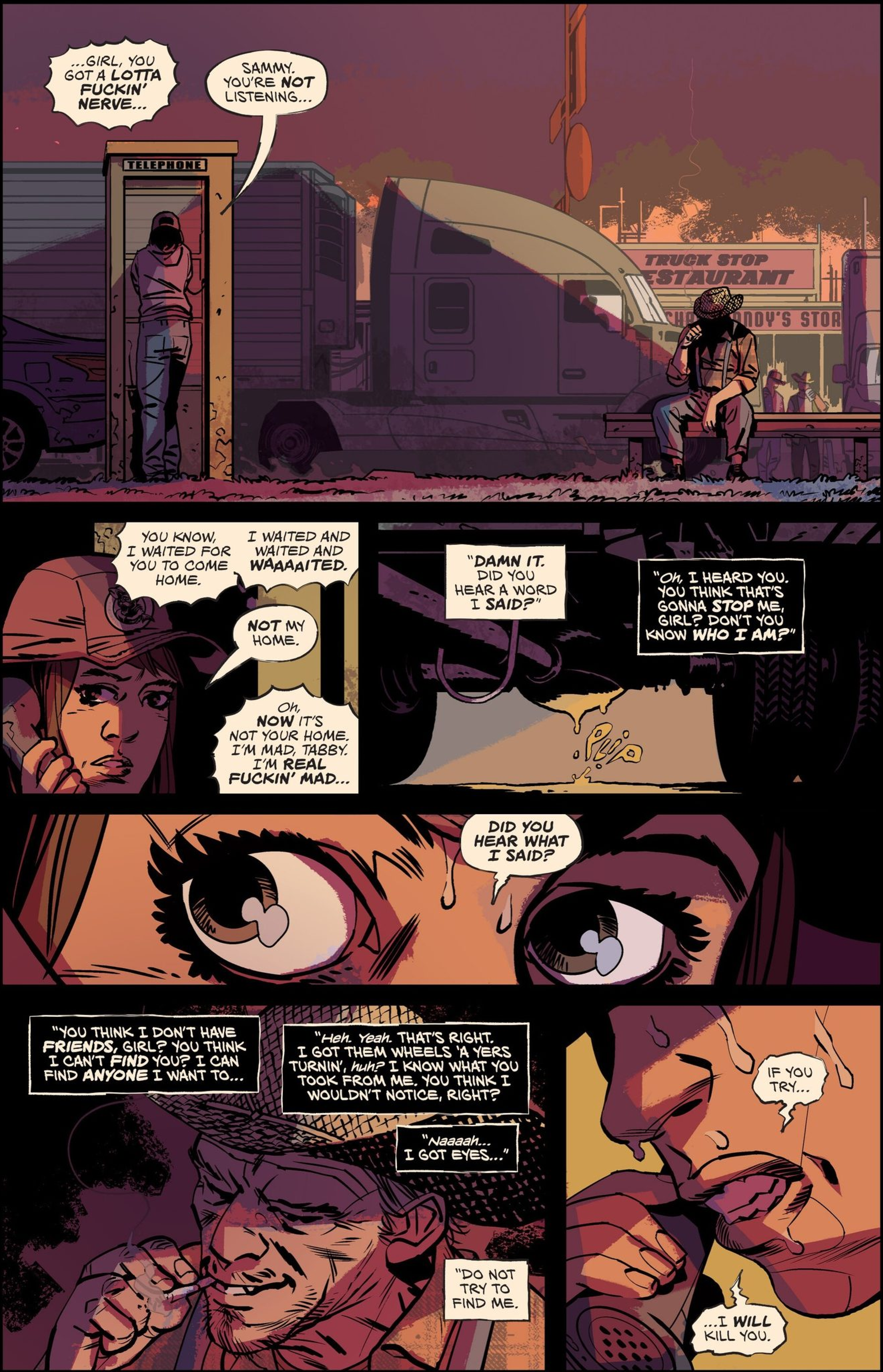
The origins of the Wildcatter myth, as it exists now, began sometime at the turn of the 20th century. It was a warning. Go ahead and dig into the earth, the myth implied, but don't get too greedy. Avaricious individuals may be met by an ill fate, one handed to them by the monstrously mysterious Wildcatter. The children of roughnecks would create songs and games which helped perpetuate the myth and, in my estimation, may have contributed to its dismissal by many in positions of authority. It also didn't help that the Wildcatter myth became fodder for horror comic books, syndicated radio programs, and low budget motion pictures (B-movies, as they're called). The most famous of these was Curse of the Hobson Ranch, a 1952 film produced by Sven Groteski and directed by Jack Turnow which featured a cat-like creature, taking the 'wildcat' name literally. Though never reaching the fame and notoriety of Big Foot, the Wildcatter had its moment in the sun, so to speak, but quickly faded into obscurity by the mid-1960s. By 1970, it had been relegated to a regional spooky story, one told by parents to their children around a campfire.

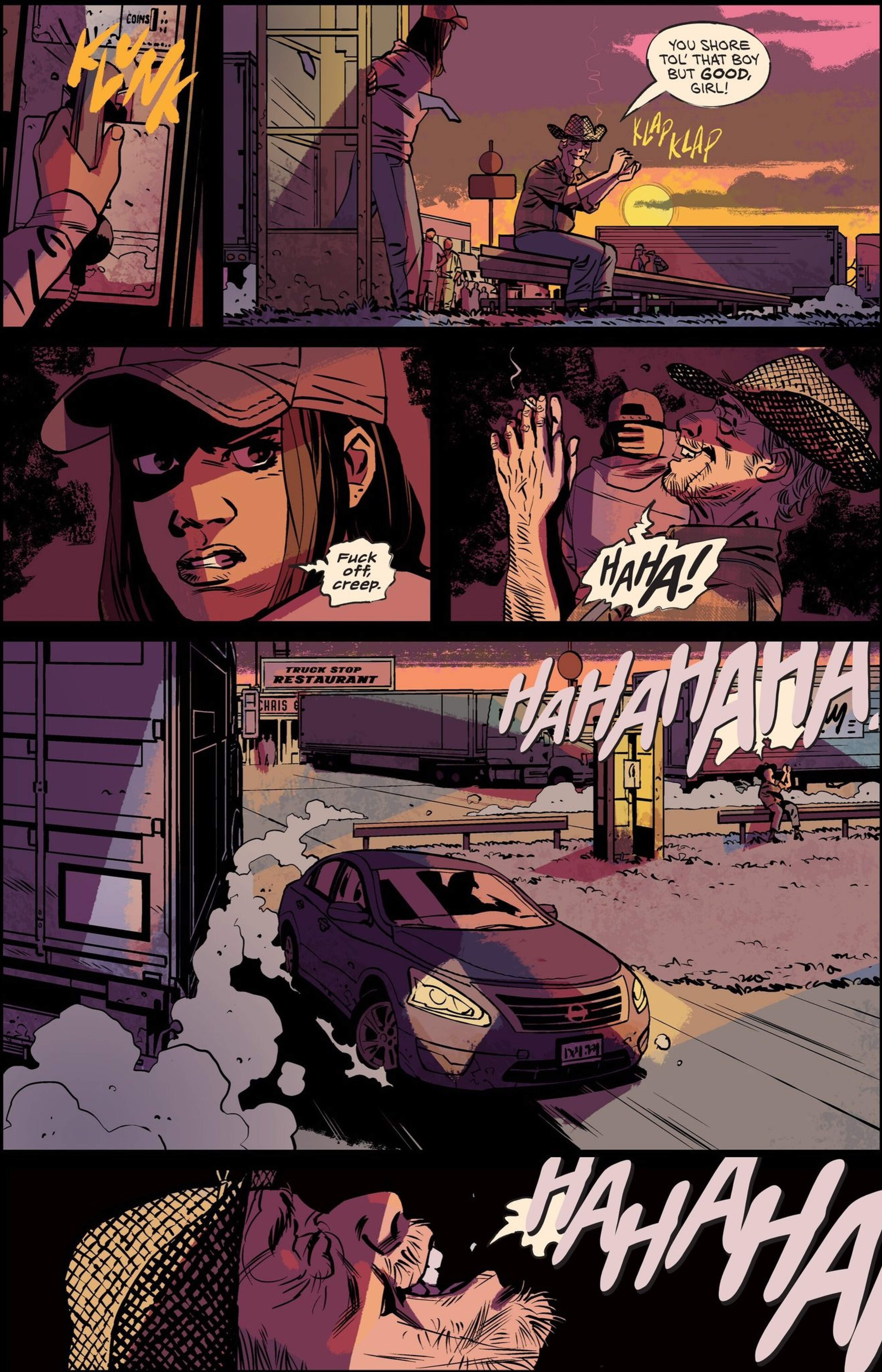
The image of the Wildcatter that I have pieced together from the various sources and witnesses that I have spoken to is one of a lumbering creature whose size is variable and can change at will. It has been described as both humanoid and animalistic, with long limbs and horns. Many describe its body as amorphous; a globular, oily entity that moves with slow, deliberate speed. Still, some say that it is a shapeshifter, one who can appear as a man or monster at will. Its touch can infect people, some say, driving its victims to the brink of insanity. Others say that it eats its victims like a wolf, tearing them limb-from-limb. One feature appears in all of these recorded accounts: the creature—the Wildcatter—has a human face.

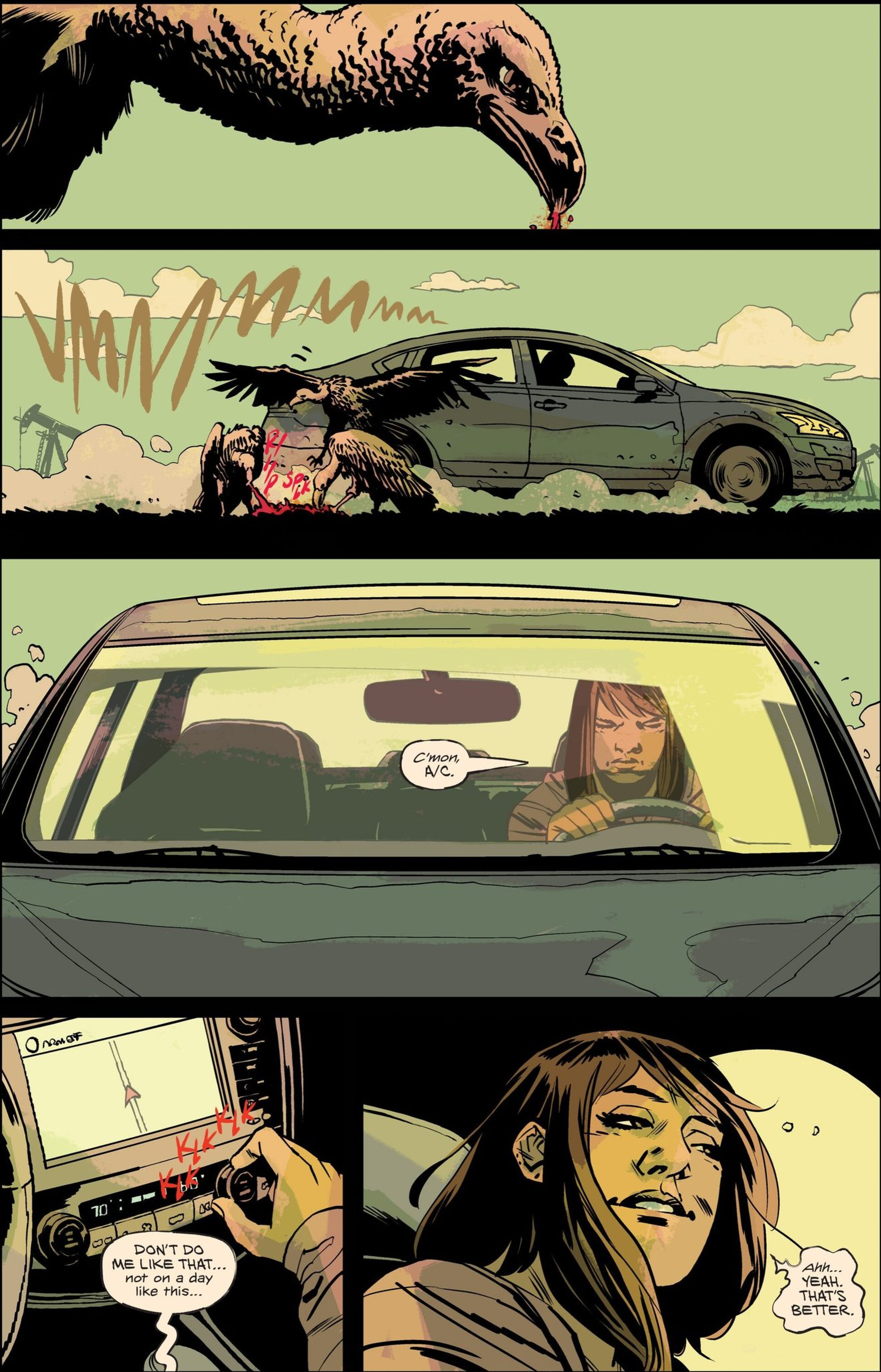
This detail, of course, has created a vast series of new conspiracy theories and myths. The name itself derives from a 'wildcat' well, or an oil well dug in the hopes of striking oil. An oil worker using a wildcat well would thus be a 'wildcatter.' In some theories, the Wildcatter monster is a mutated oilman, searching for his lost fortune and is willing to kill in order to get his revenge.

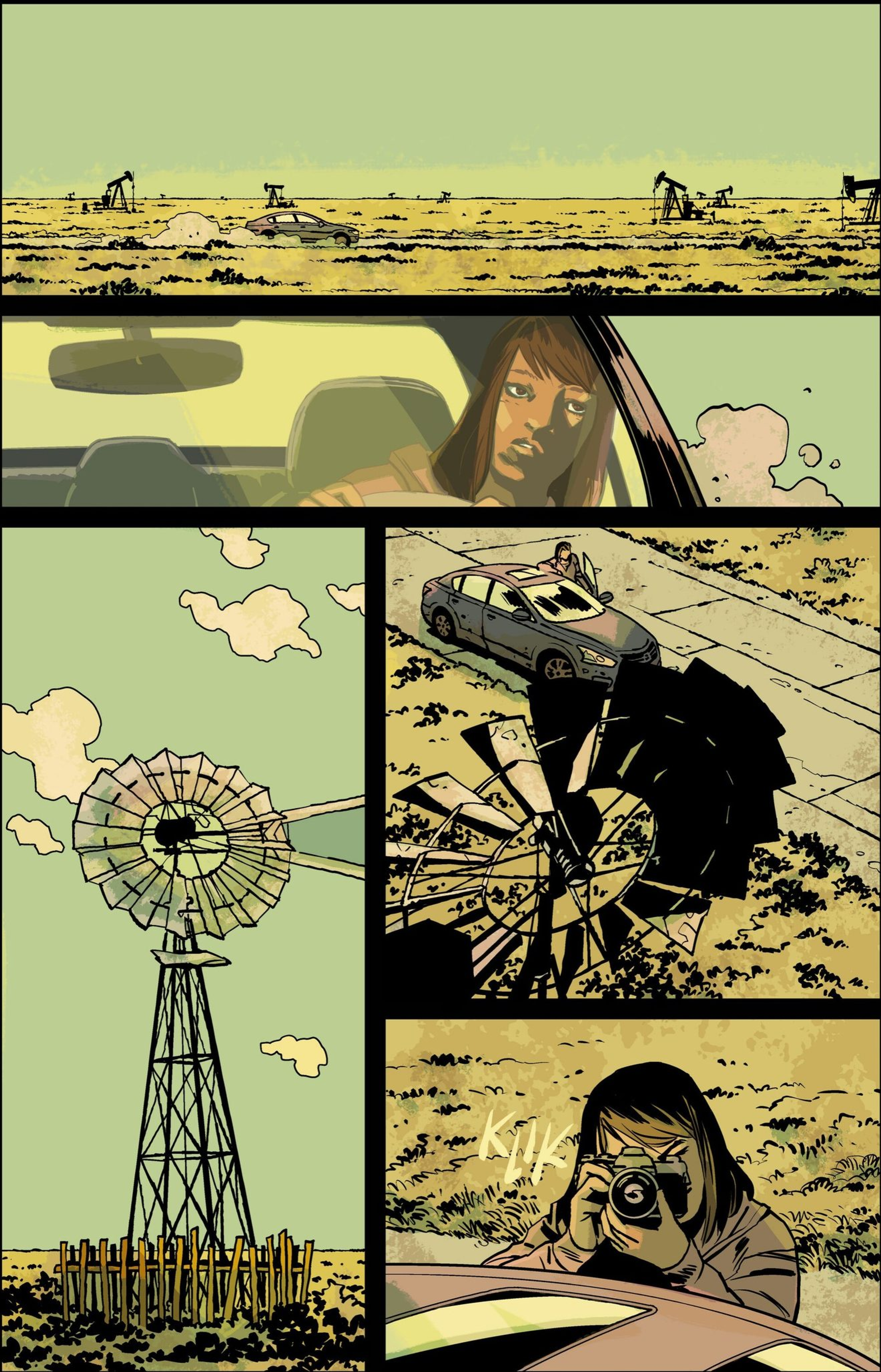
But the truth is far stranger than that.

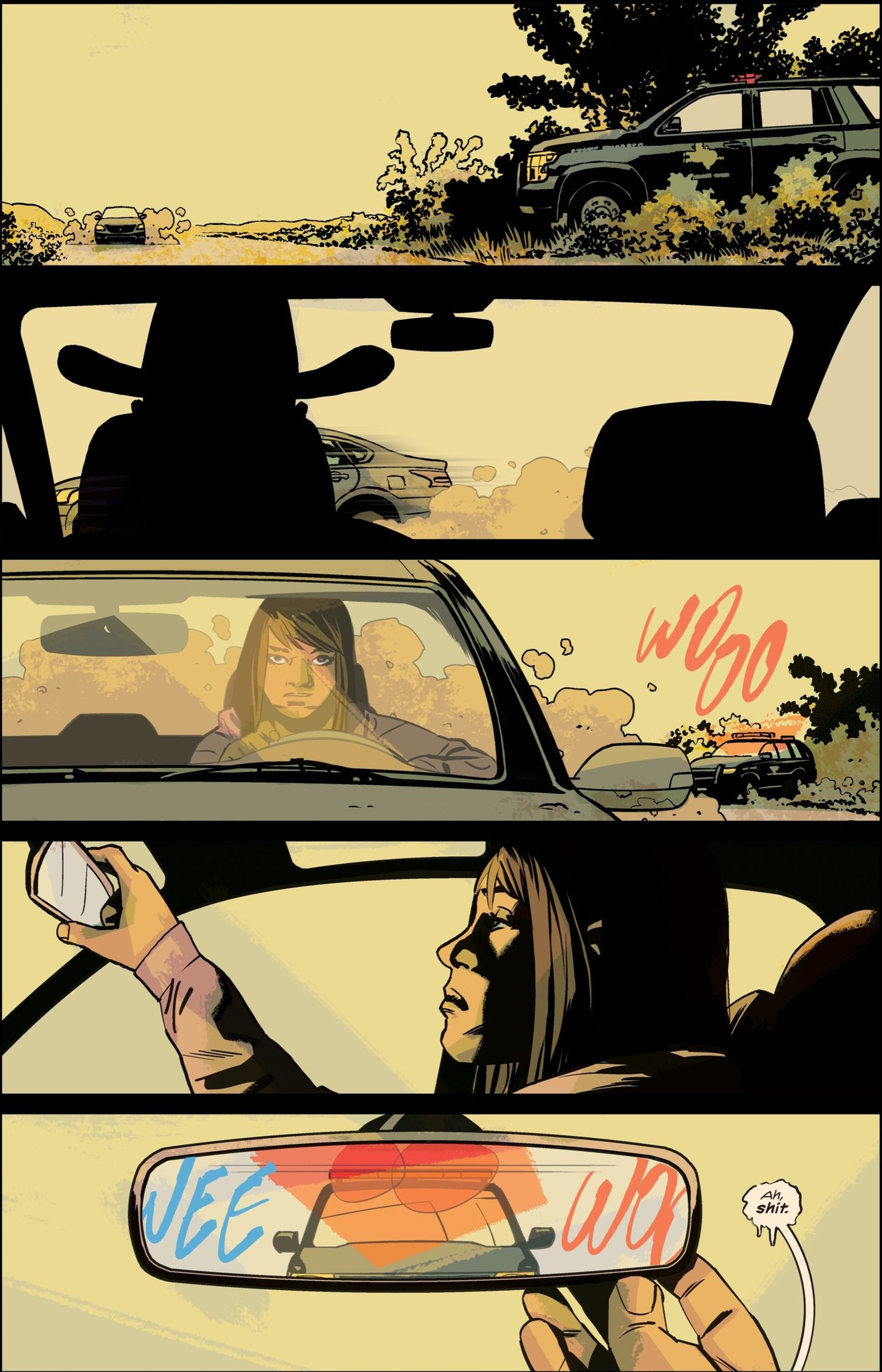

"H-HELLO...? WHO IS THIS?
"It's too goddamn *early*...
"*Hellllooo?* I can hear you breathing..."
"IT'S ME."
"...AM I SUPPOSED TO GUESS?"
"I DIDN'T CALL TO SAY HI. I CALLED TO TELL YOU I'M **GONE.**
SPLSH
"YOU WON'T FIND ME.
"DON'T TRY.
"SAY SOMETHING SO I KNOW YOU UNDERSTAND."
"..Tabby...
"...Tabby, Tabby, ***Tabby***...

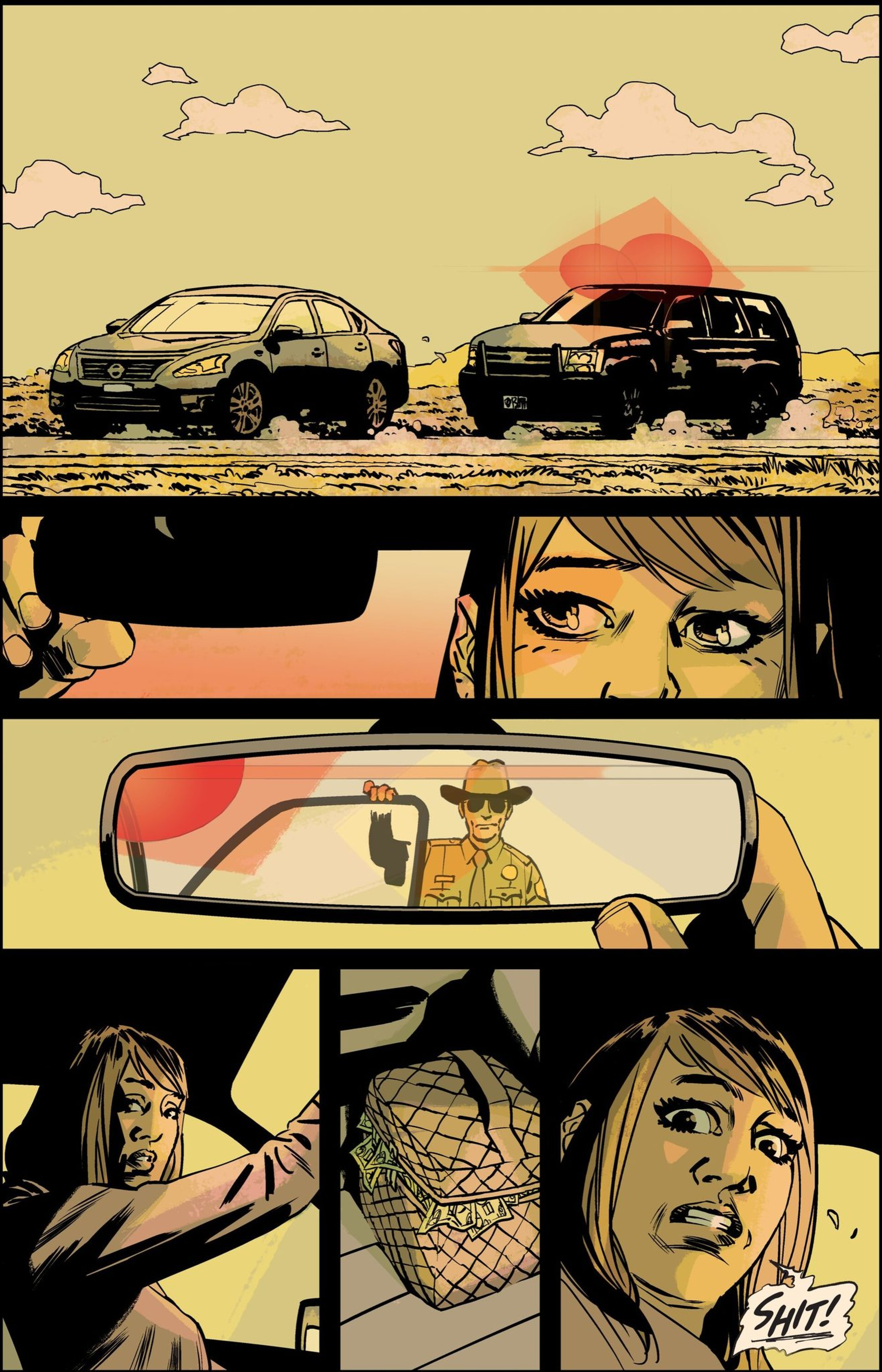

...GIRL, YOU GOT A **LOTTA FUCKIN'** NERVE...
SAMMY. YOU'RE **NOT** LISTENING...
TELEPHONE
TRUCK STOP
ESTAURANT
CHA ANDY'S STOR
YOU KNOW, I WAITED FOR YOU TO COME HOME.
I WAITED AND WAITED AND **WAAAAITED.**
NOT MY HOME.
Oh, **NOW** IT'S NOT YOUR HOME. I'M MAD, TABBY. I'M **REAL FUCKIN' MAD...**
"**DAMN IT.** DID YOU HEAR A WORD I **SAID?**"
"*Oh,* I HEARD YOU. YOU THINK THAT'S GONNA **STOP** ME, GIRL? DON'T YOU KNOW **WHO I AM?**"
PLIP
DID YOU HEAR WHAT I SAID?
"YOU THINK I DON'T HAVE **FRIENDS,** GIRL? YOU THINK I CAN'T **FIND** YOU? I CAN FIND **ANYONE** I WANT TO...
"*Heh. Yeah.* THAT'S RIGHT. I GOT THEM WHEELS 'A YERS TURNIN', *huh?* I KNOW WHAT YOU TOOK FROM ME. YOU THINK I WOULDN'T NOTICE, RIGHT?
"*Naaaah...* I GOT EYES..."
"DO NOT TRY TO FIND ME.
IF YOU TRY...
...I **WILL** KILL YOU.

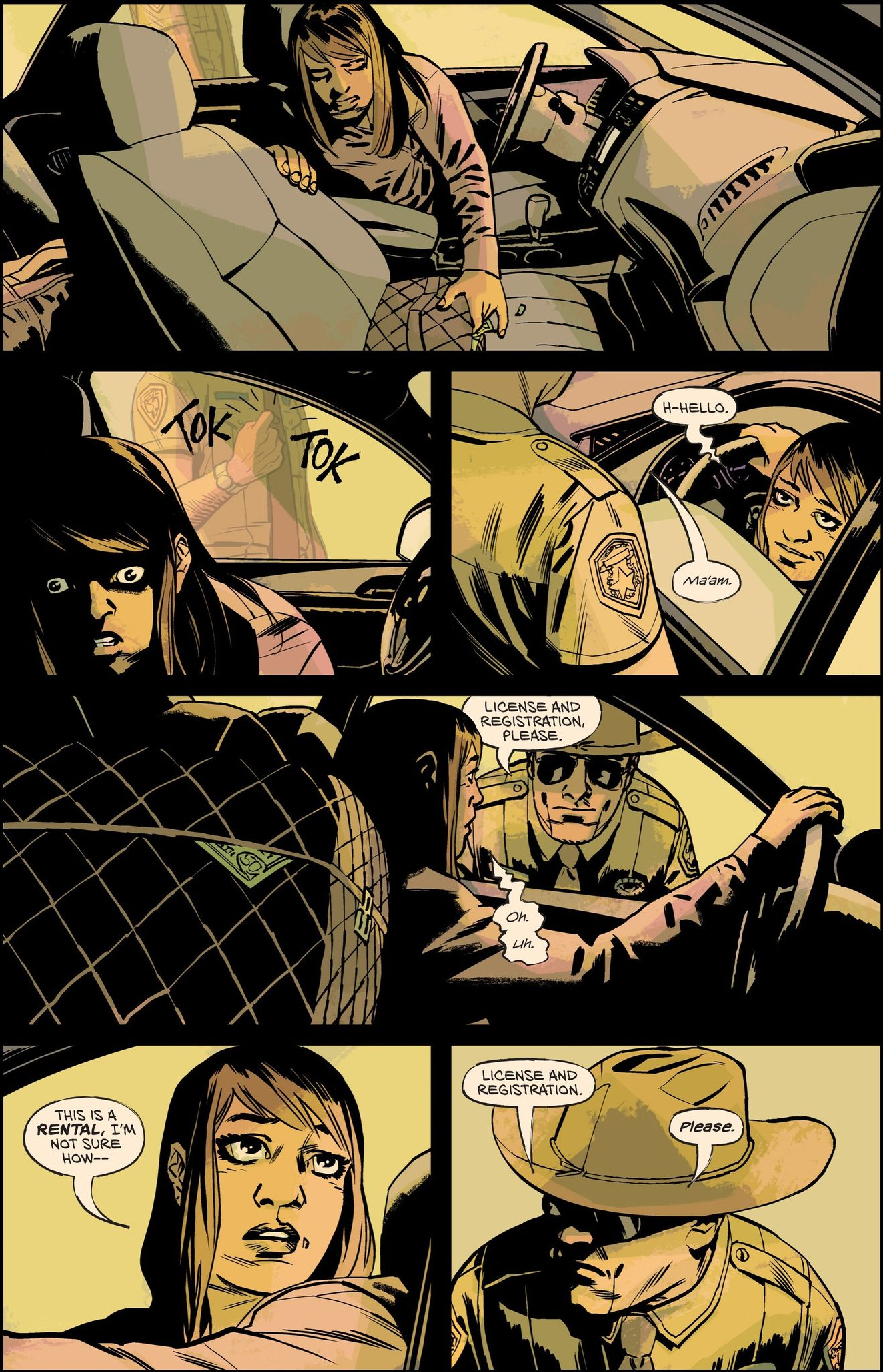

COINS
KLUNK
YOU SHORE TOL' THAT BOY BUT GOOD, GIRL!
KLAP KLAP
Fuck off, creep.
HAHA!
TRUCK STOP RESTAURANT
CHRIS G
HAHAHAHAHA
HAHAHA

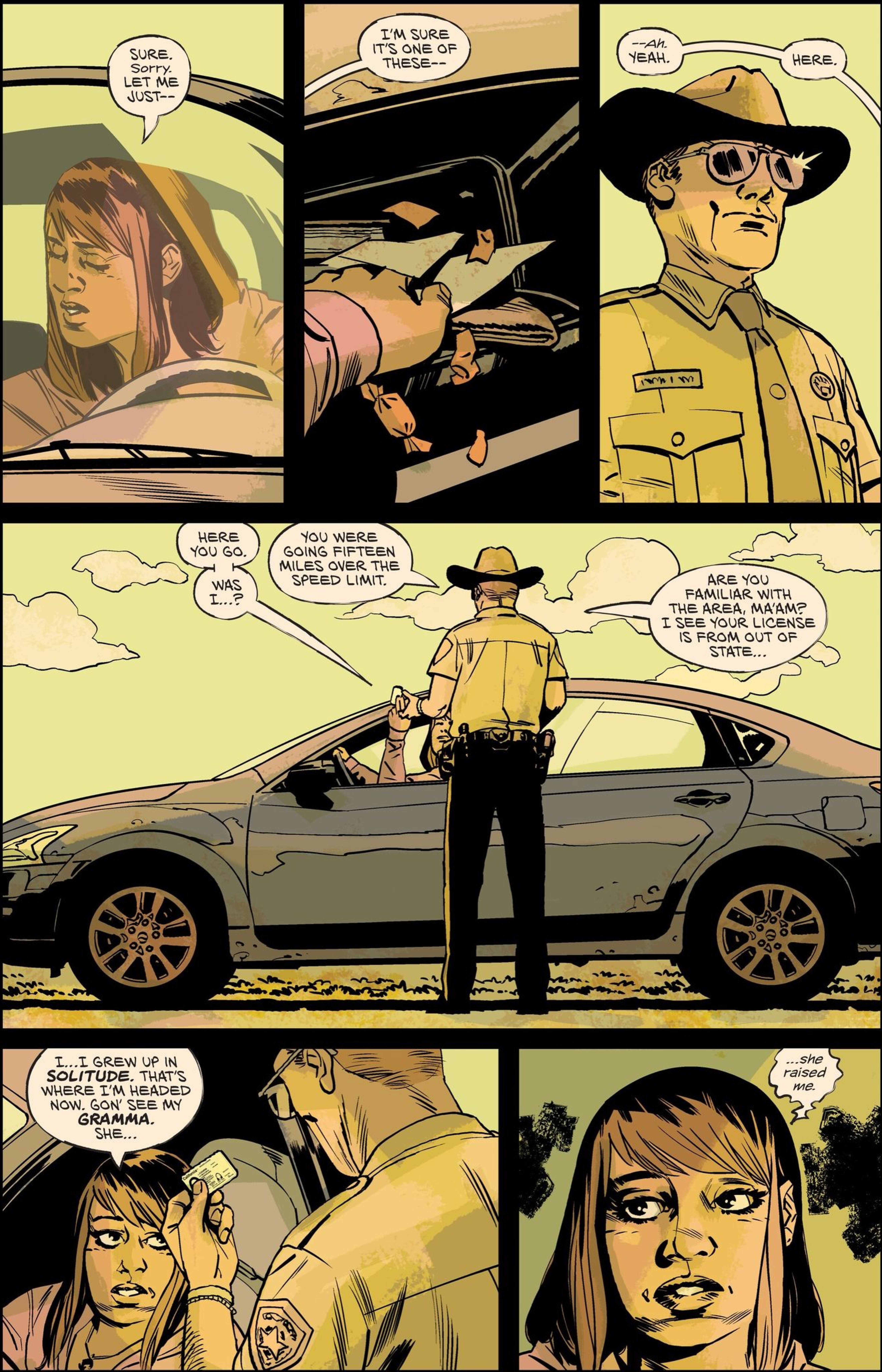

VMMMMMmm
RIIP
SPLK
C'mon, A/C.
KLIK KLIK
KLIK
70
DON'T DO ME LIKE THAT... not on a day like this...
Ahh... YEAH. THAT'S BETTER.

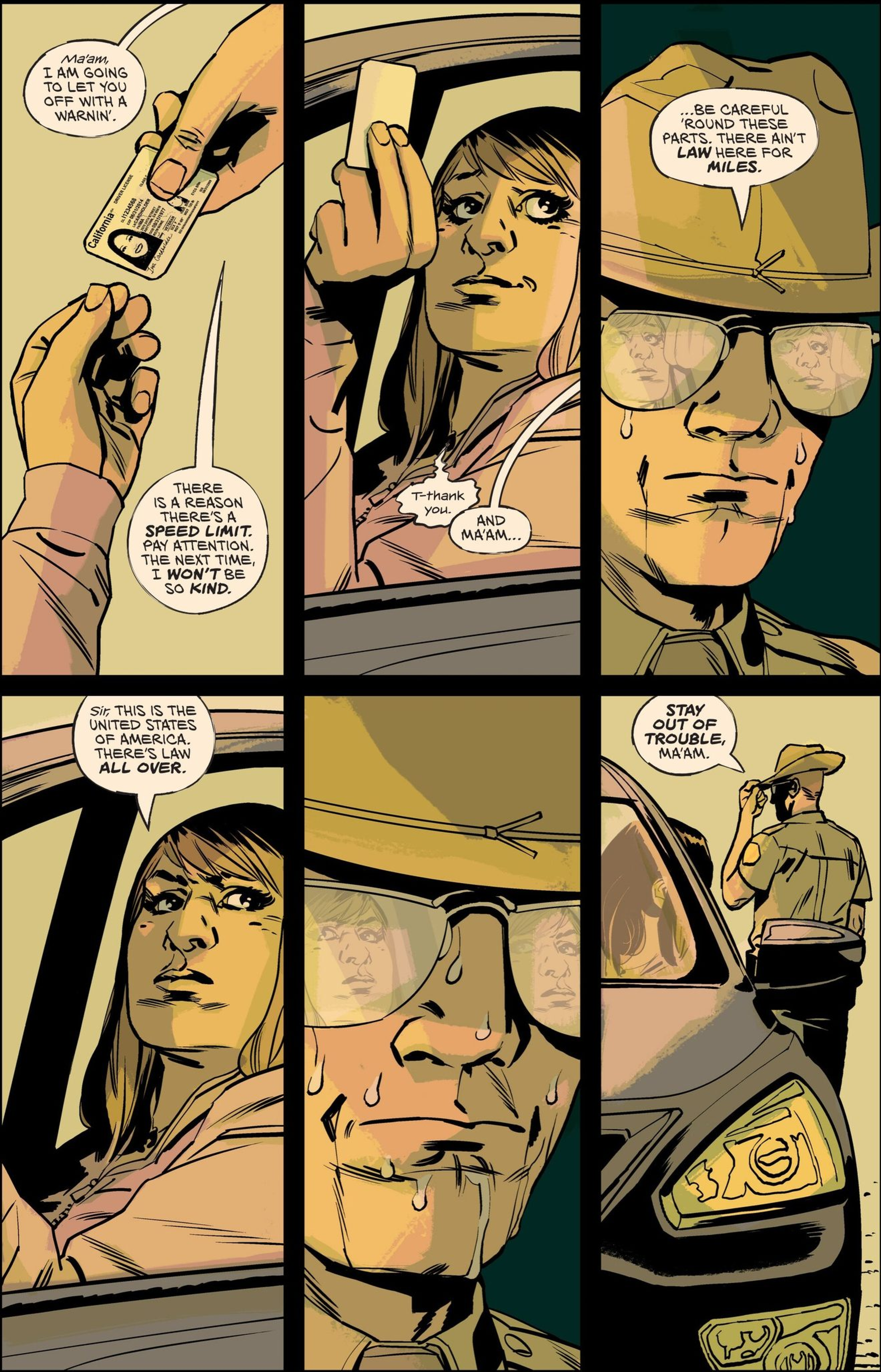

KLIK

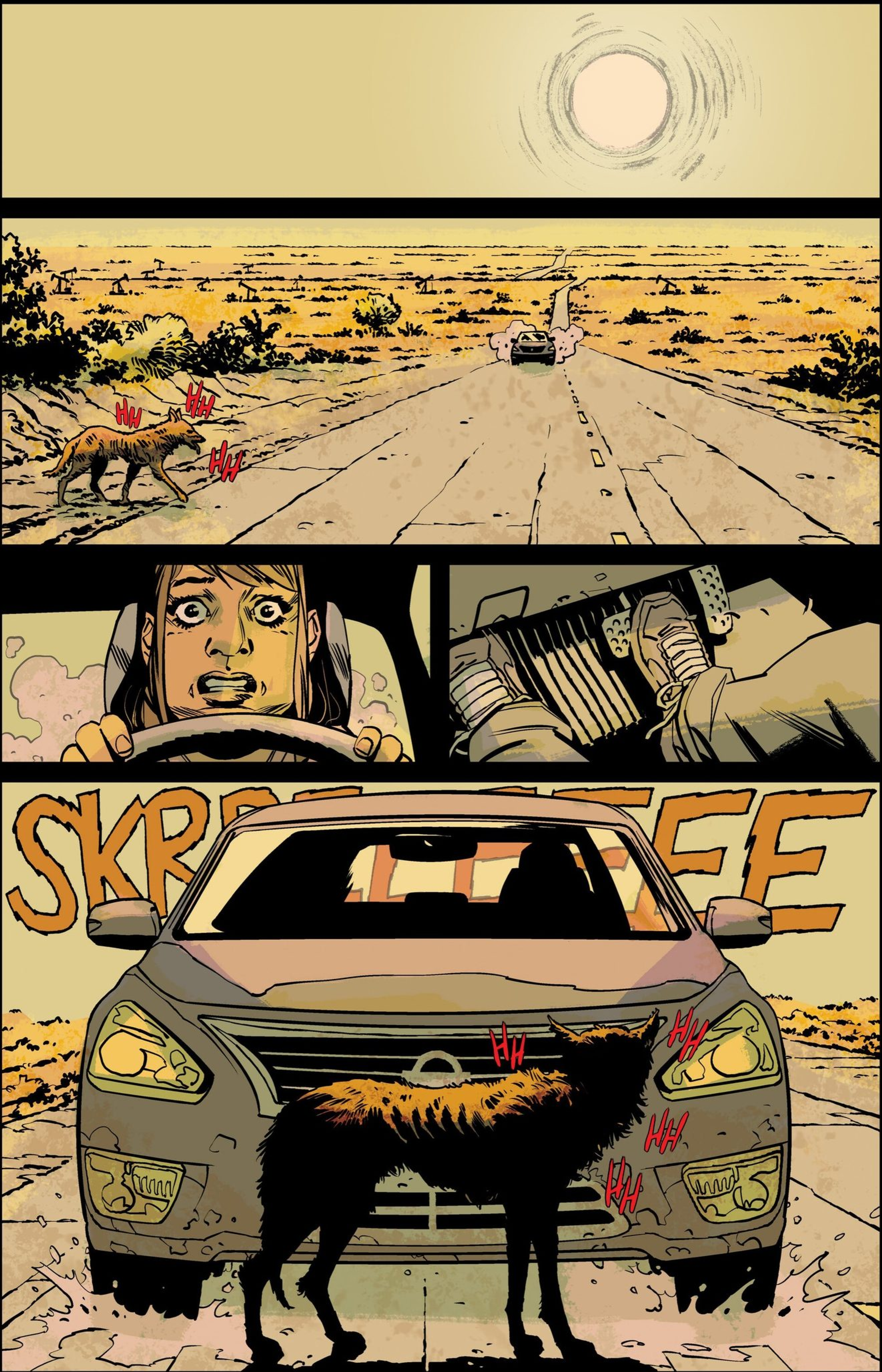

WOO
WEE
WO
Ah, shit.

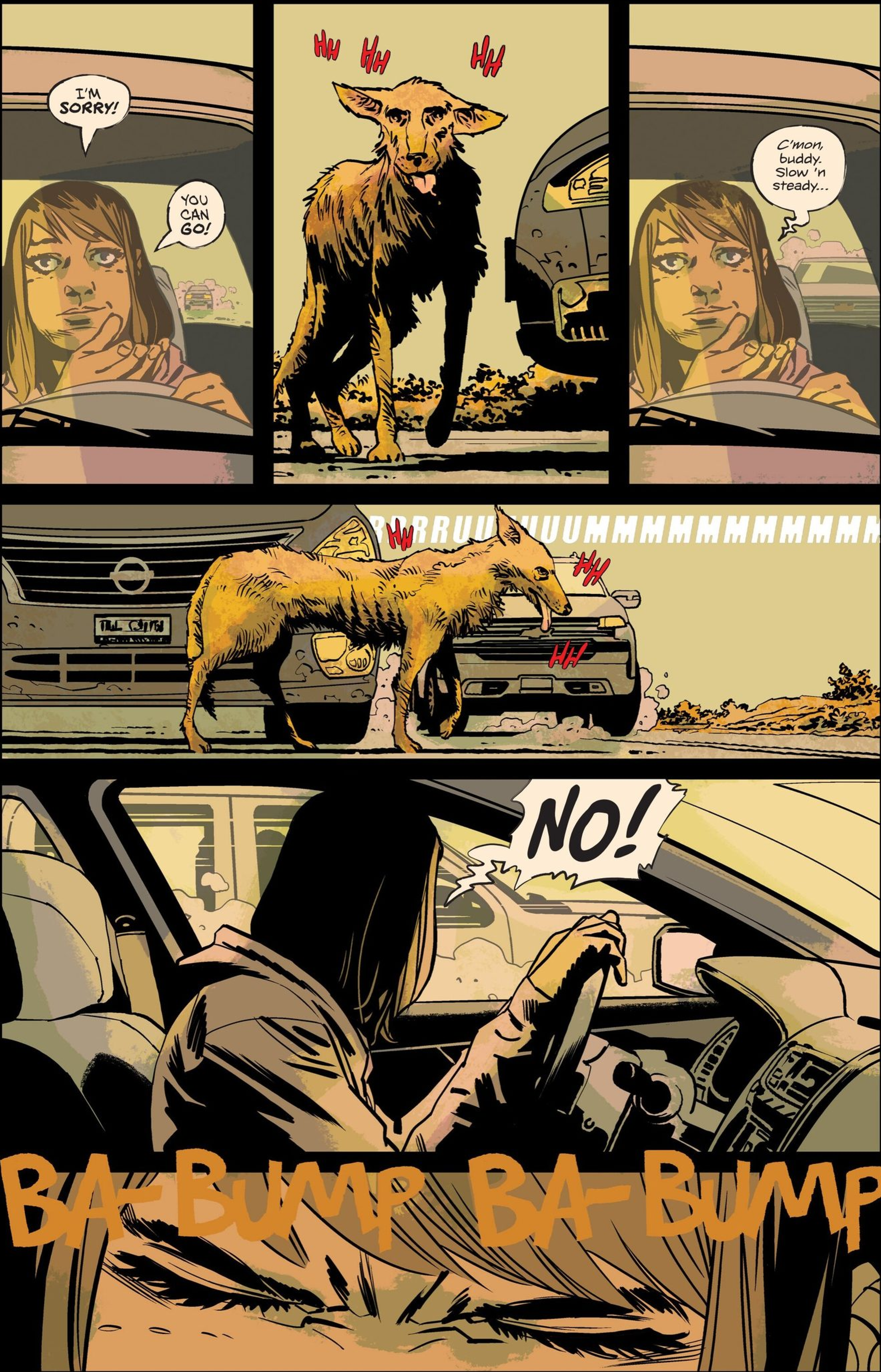

SHIT!

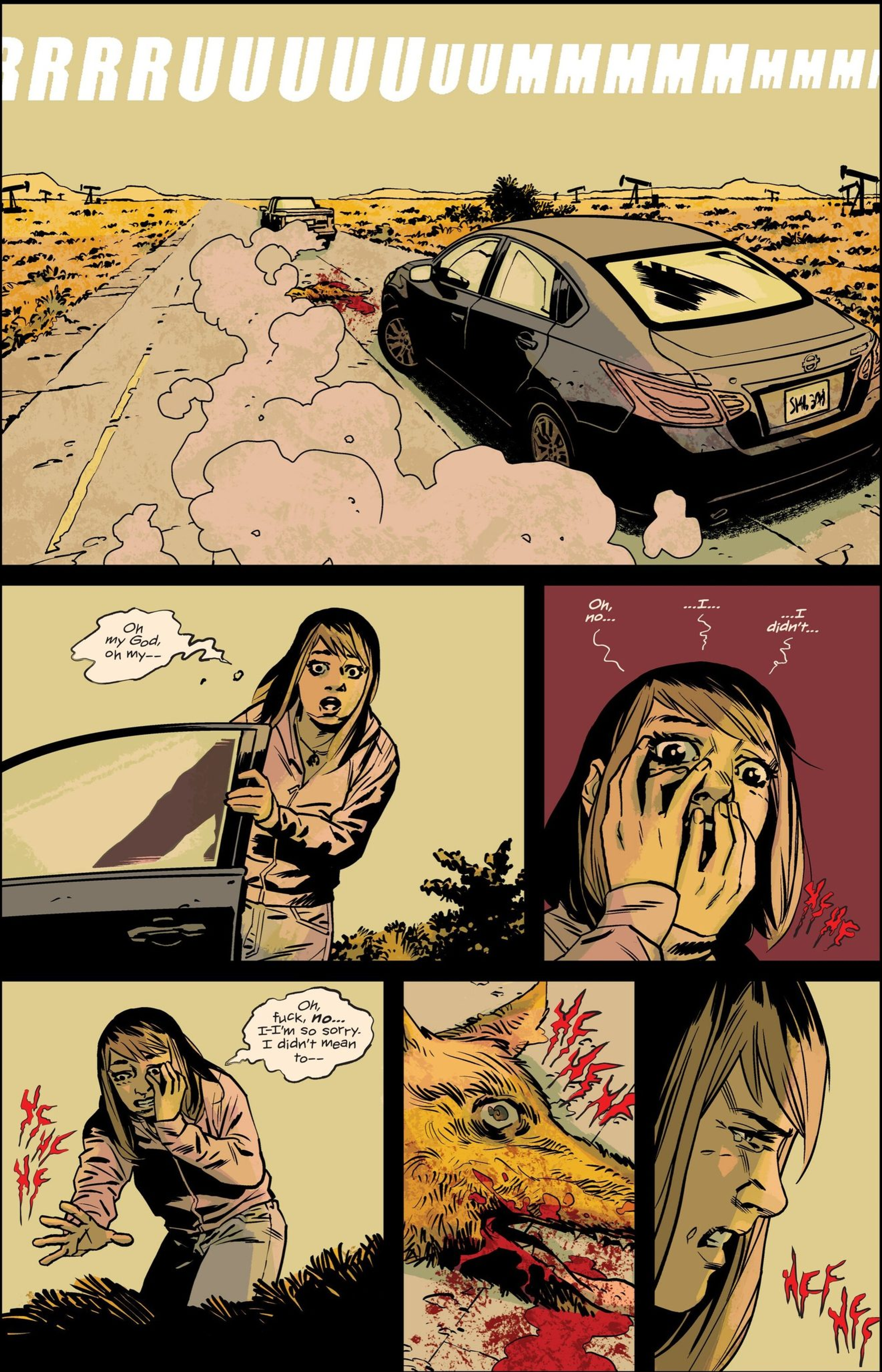

TOK
TOK
H-HELLO.
Ma'am.
LICENSE AND REGISTRATION, PLEASE.
Oh.
Uh.
THIS IS A **RENTAL**, I'M NOT SURE HOW--
LICENSE AND REGISTRATION.
Please.

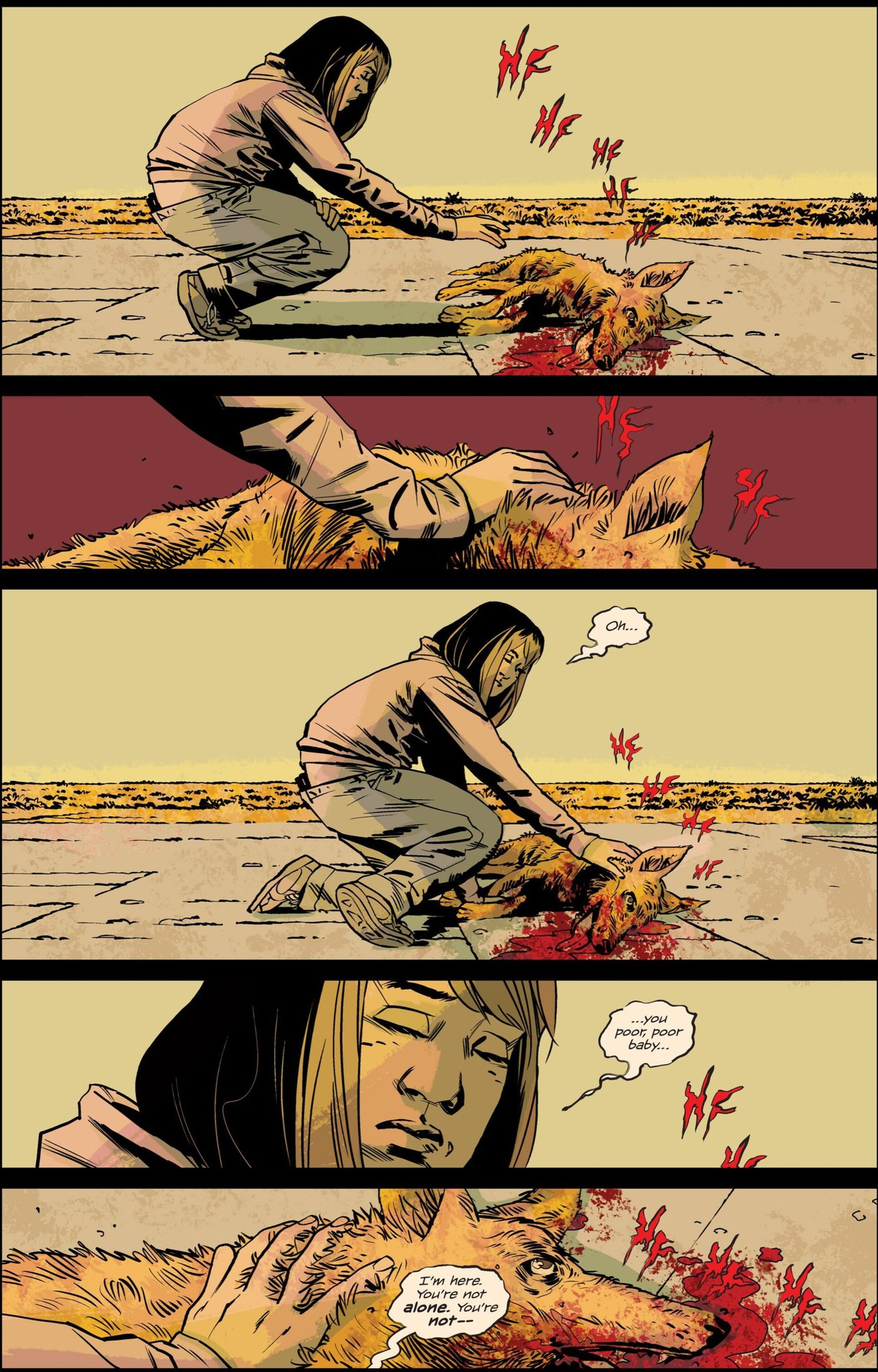

SURE. Sorry. LET ME JUST--
I'M SURE IT'S ONE OF THESE--
--Ah. YEAH.
HERE.
HERE YOU GO.
WAS I...?
YOU WERE GOING FIFTEEN MILES OVER THE SPEED LIMIT.
ARE YOU FAMILIAR WITH THE AREA, MA'AM? I SEE YOUR LICENSE IS FROM OUT OF STATE...
I...I GREW UP IN SOLITUDE. THAT'S WHERE I'M HEADED NOW. GON' SEE MY GRAMMA. SHE...
...she raised me.

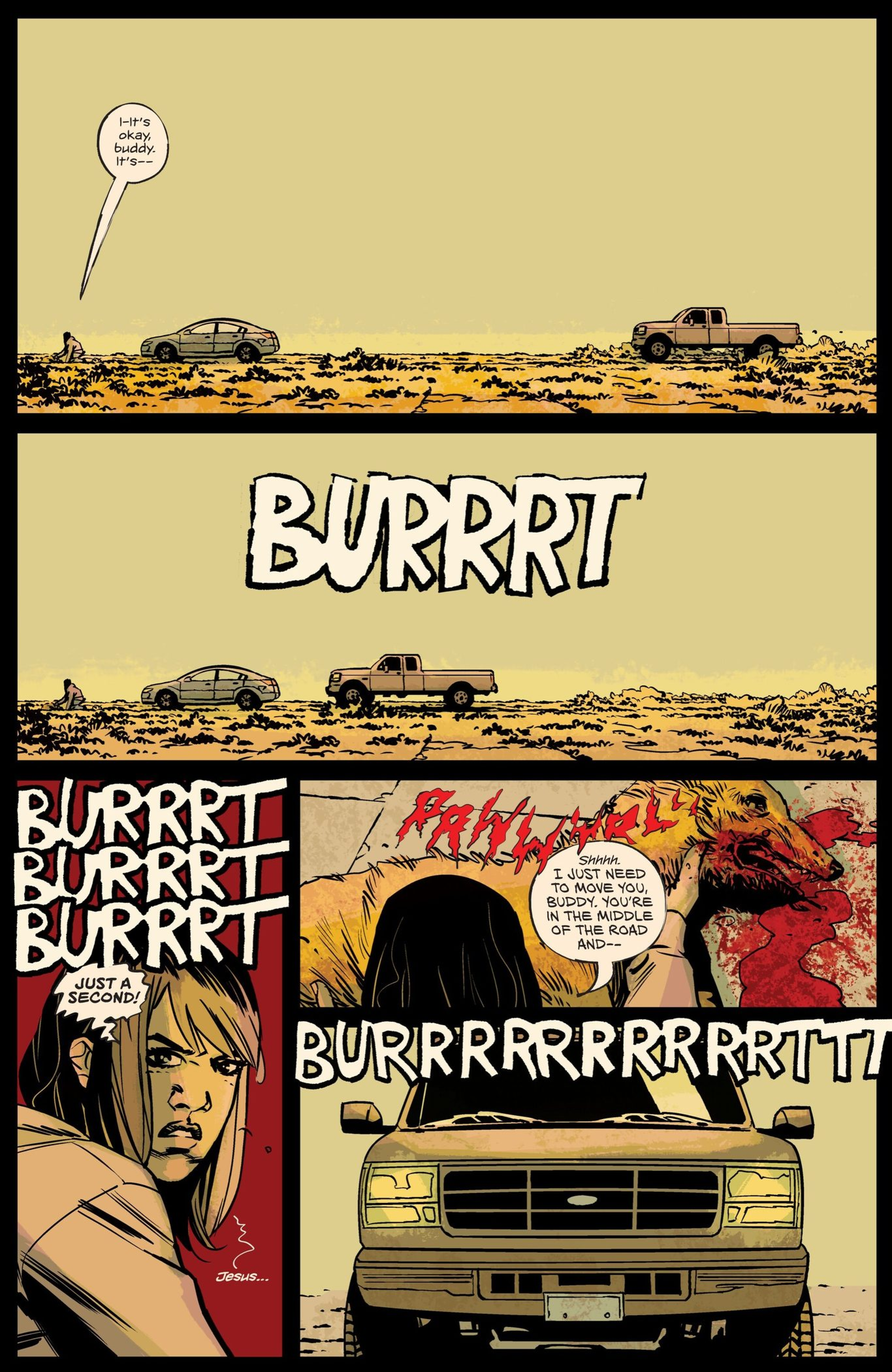

Ma'am, I AM GOING TO LET YOU OFF WITH A WARNIN'.
California
THERE IS A REASON THERE'S A SPEED LIMIT. PAY ATTENTION. THE NEXT TIME, I WON'T BE SO KIND.
T-thank you.
AND MA'AM...
...BE CAREFUL 'ROUND THESE PARTS. THERE AIN'T LAW HERE FOR MILES.
Sir, THIS IS THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA. THERE'S LAW ALL OVER.
STAY OUT OF TROUBLE, MA'AM.

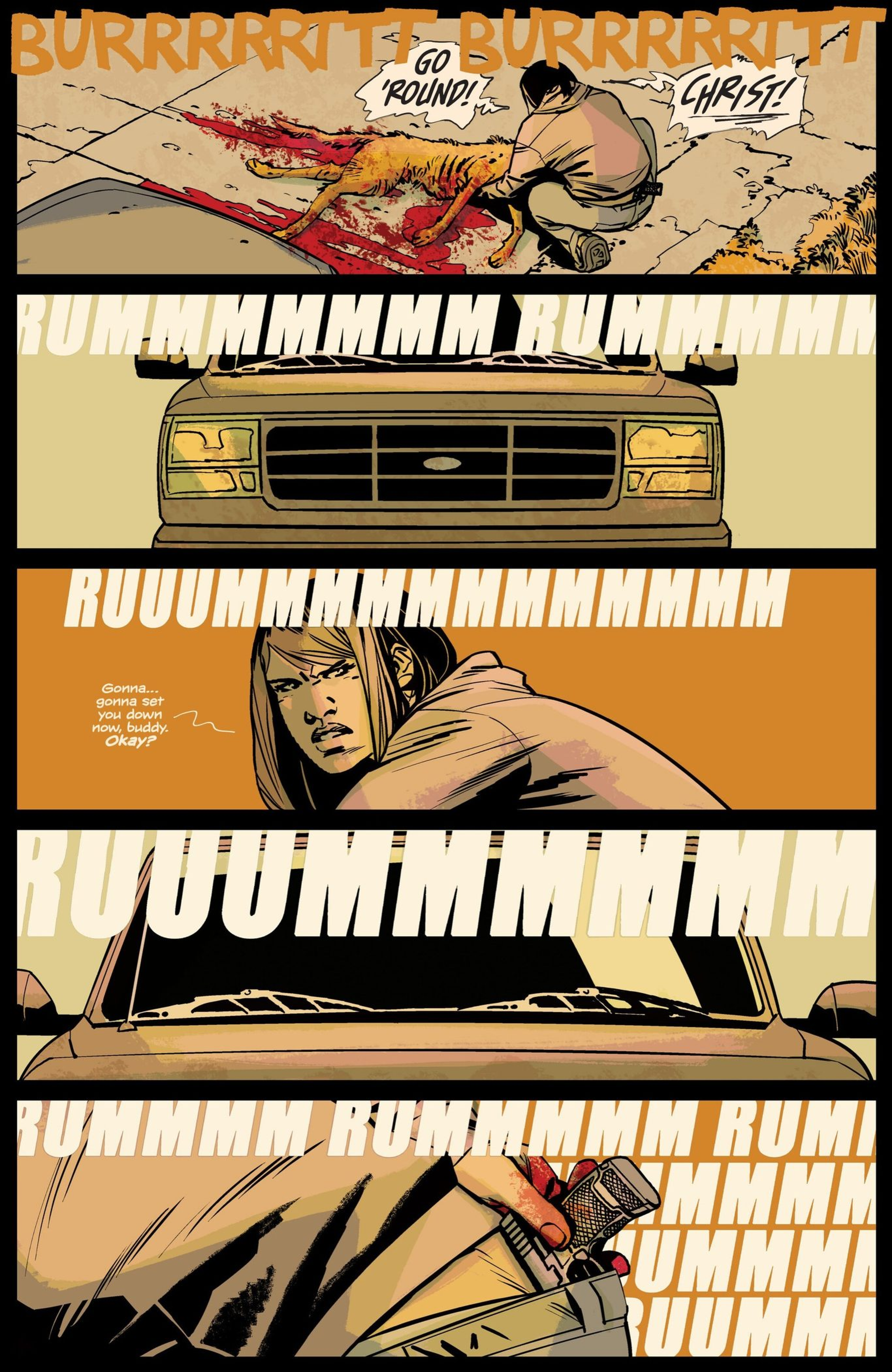

HH
HH
HH
SKR
EE
HH
HH
HH
HH

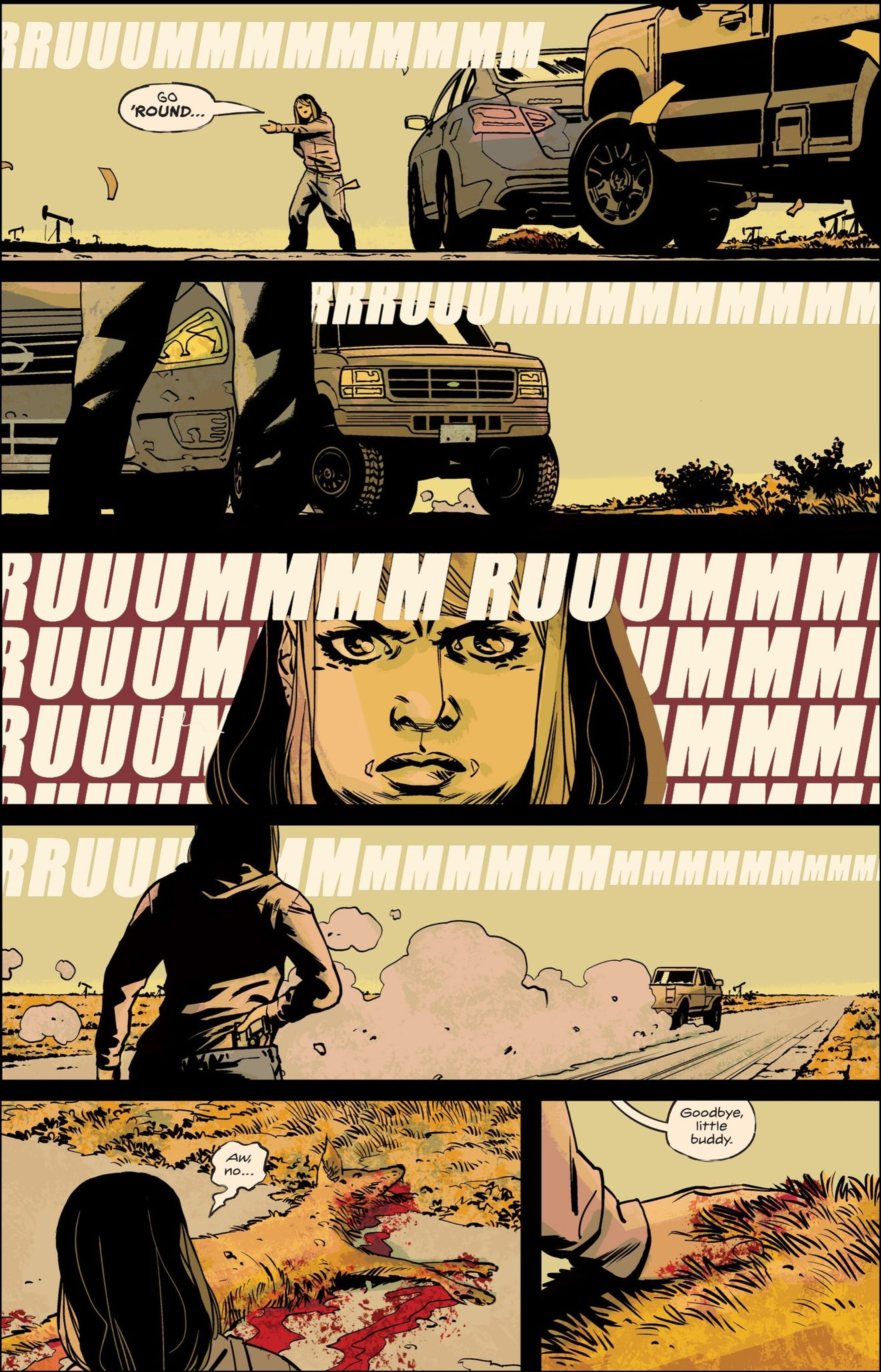

I'M SORRY!
YOU CAN GO!
HH HH HH
C'mon, buddy. Slow 'n steady...
HH
BRRRUUUUUUUMMMMMMMMMMM
HH
HH
NO!
BA-BUMP BA-BUMP

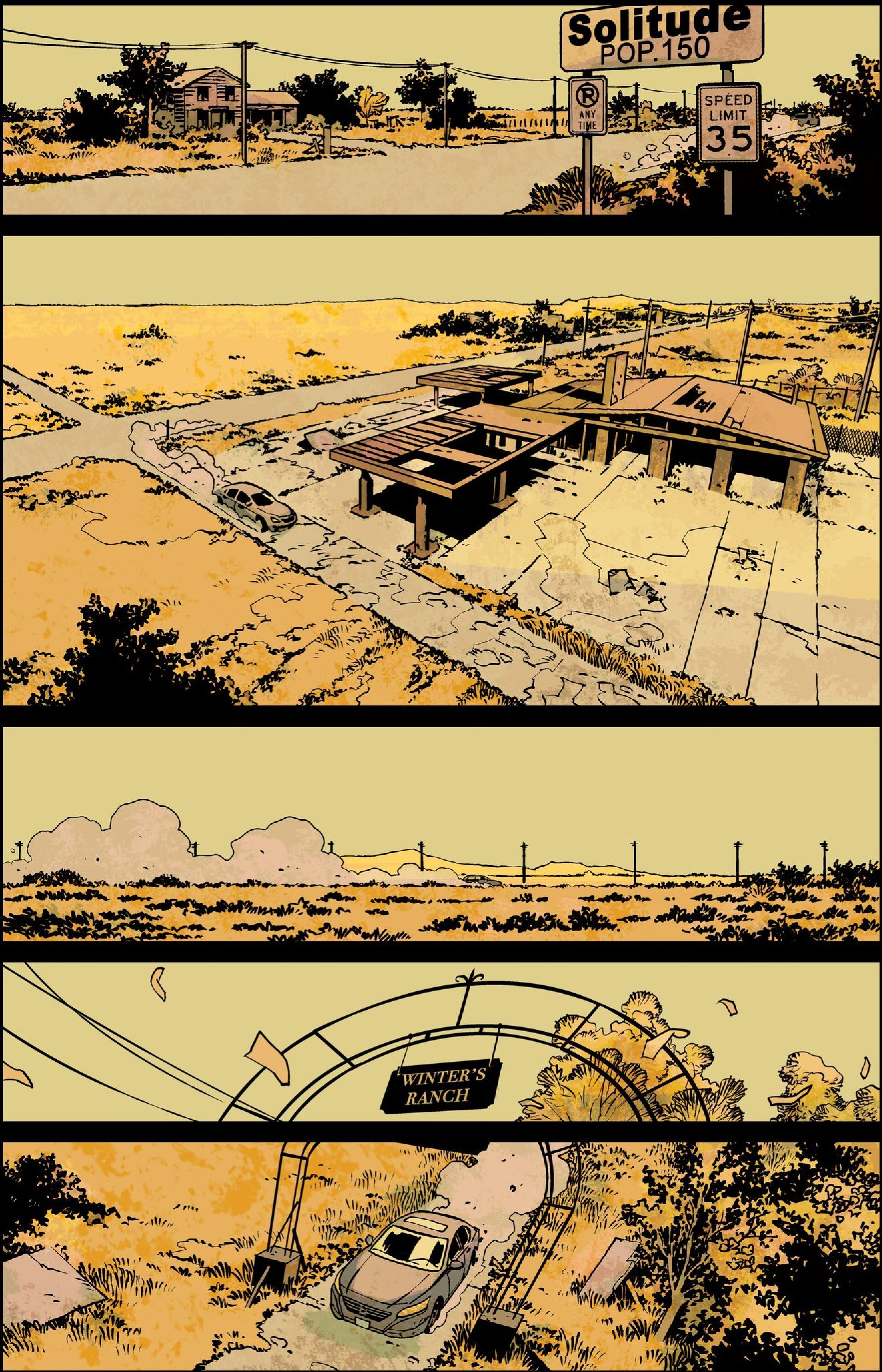

RRRRUUUUUUUUMMMMMMMM
Oh my God, oh my--
Oh, no...
...I...
...I didn't...
HC HF
Oh, fuck, **no...** I-I'm so sorry. I didn't mean to--
HC HC HF
HF HF HF
HCF HCF

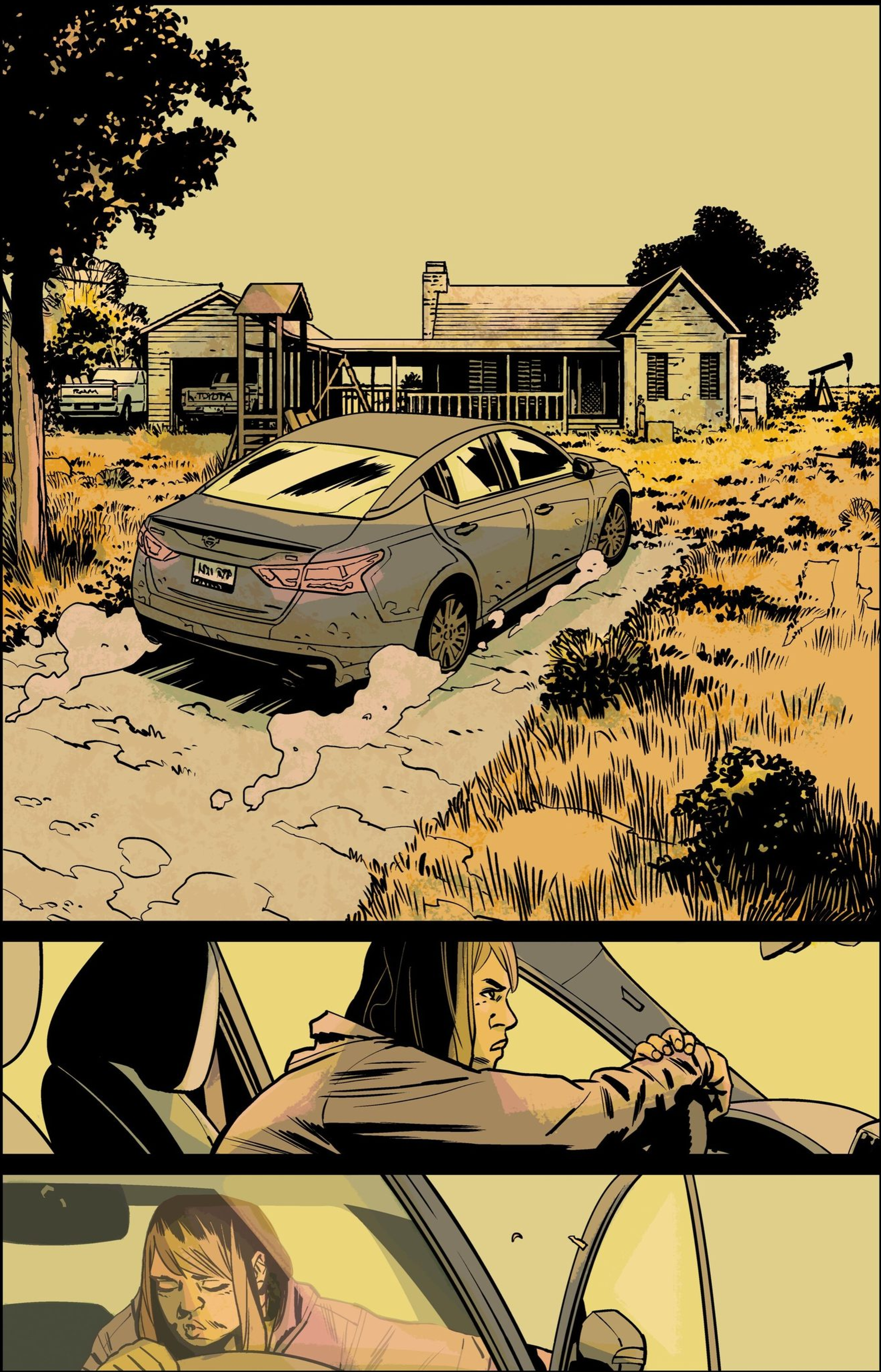

HF
HF
HF
HF
HF
HF
HF
Oh...
HF
HF
HF
HF
...you poor, poor baby...
HF
HF
I'm here. You're not **alone.** You're **not--**
HF
HF
HF

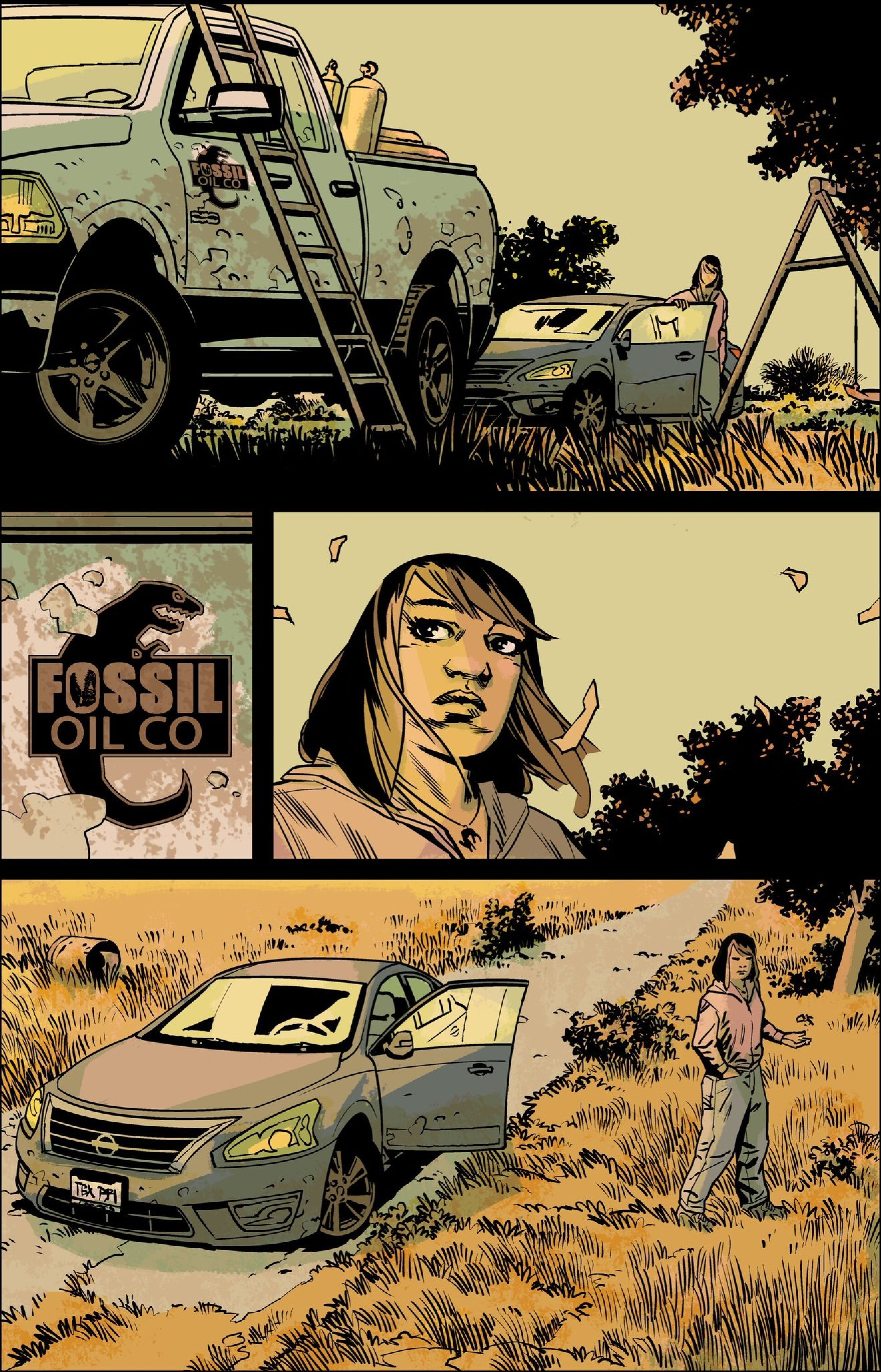

I-It's okay, buddy. It's--
BURRRT
BURRRT
BURRRT
BURRRT
JUST A SECOND!
Jesus...
RRWWRRL
Shhhh. I JUST NEED TO MOVE YOU, BUDDY. YOU'RE IN THE MIDDLE OF THE ROAD AND--
BURRRRRRRRRRRTTT

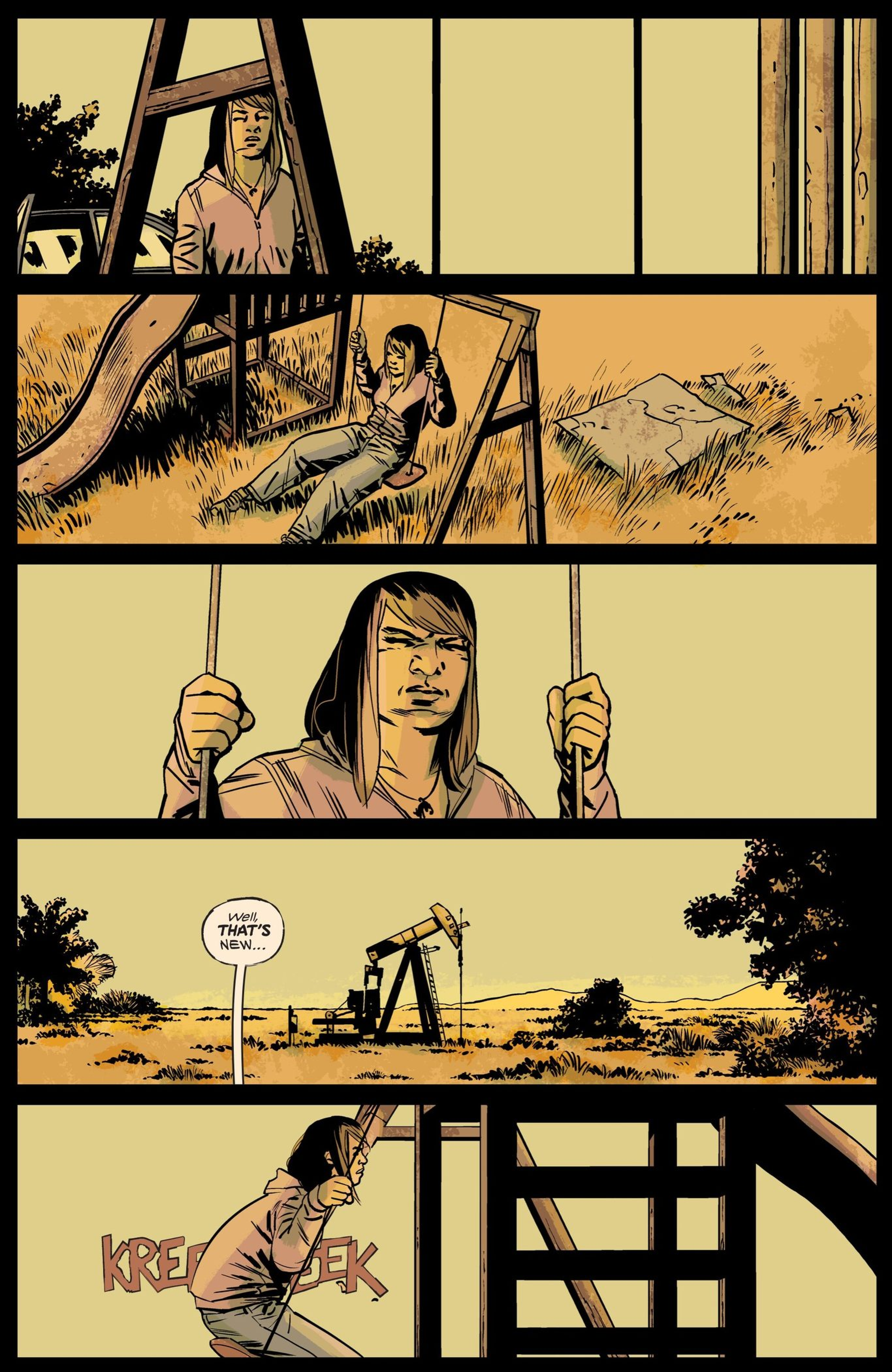

BURRRRRTTT BURRRRRRTTT
GO 'ROUND!
CHRIST!
RUMMMMMMMM RUMMMMMM
RUUUMMMMMMMMMMMM
Gonna... gonna set you down now, buddy. *Okay?*
RUUUMMMMMMMM
RUMMMMM RUMMMMMMM RUM
MMMMMM
UMMMMM
RUUMMM

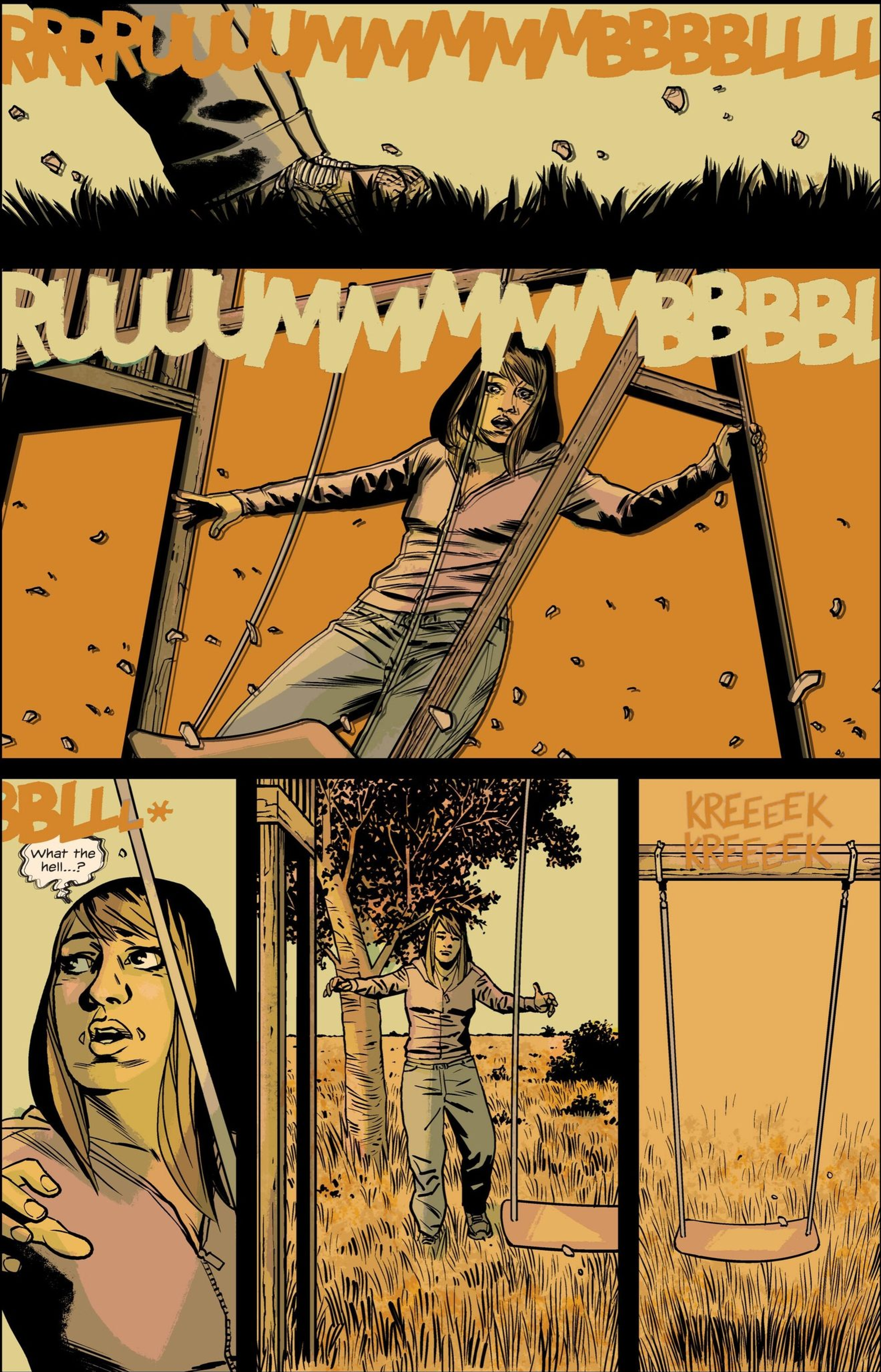

RRUUUMMMMMMMMMM
GO 'ROUND...
RRRUUUMMMMMMMMMMMM
RUUUMMMM RUUUMMM
RUUUM MMMMM
RUUUM MMMMM
RRUUUMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMMM
Aw, no...
Goodbye, little buddy.

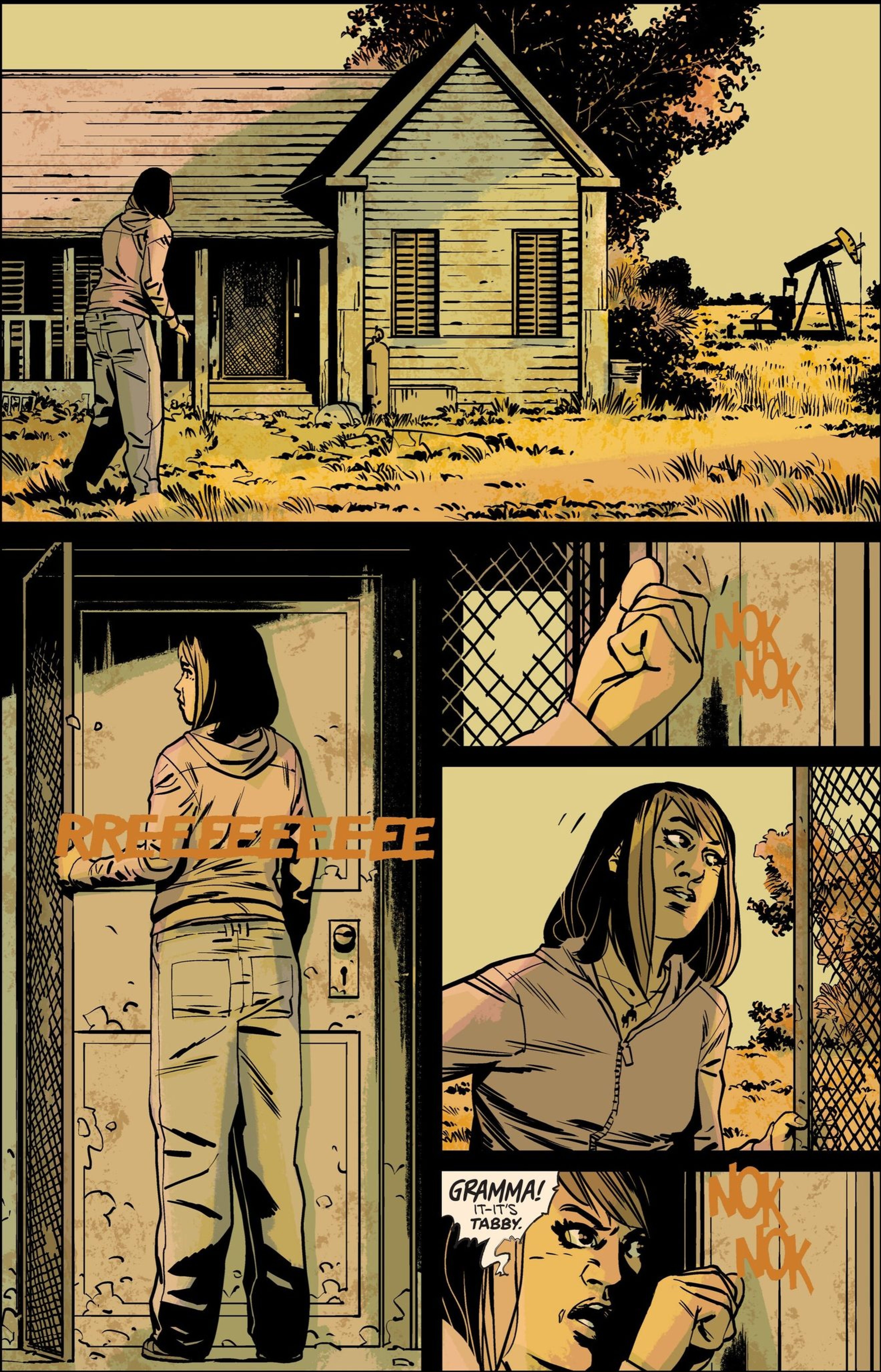

Solitude
POP.150
ANY TIME
SPEED LIMIT
35
WINTER'S RANCH

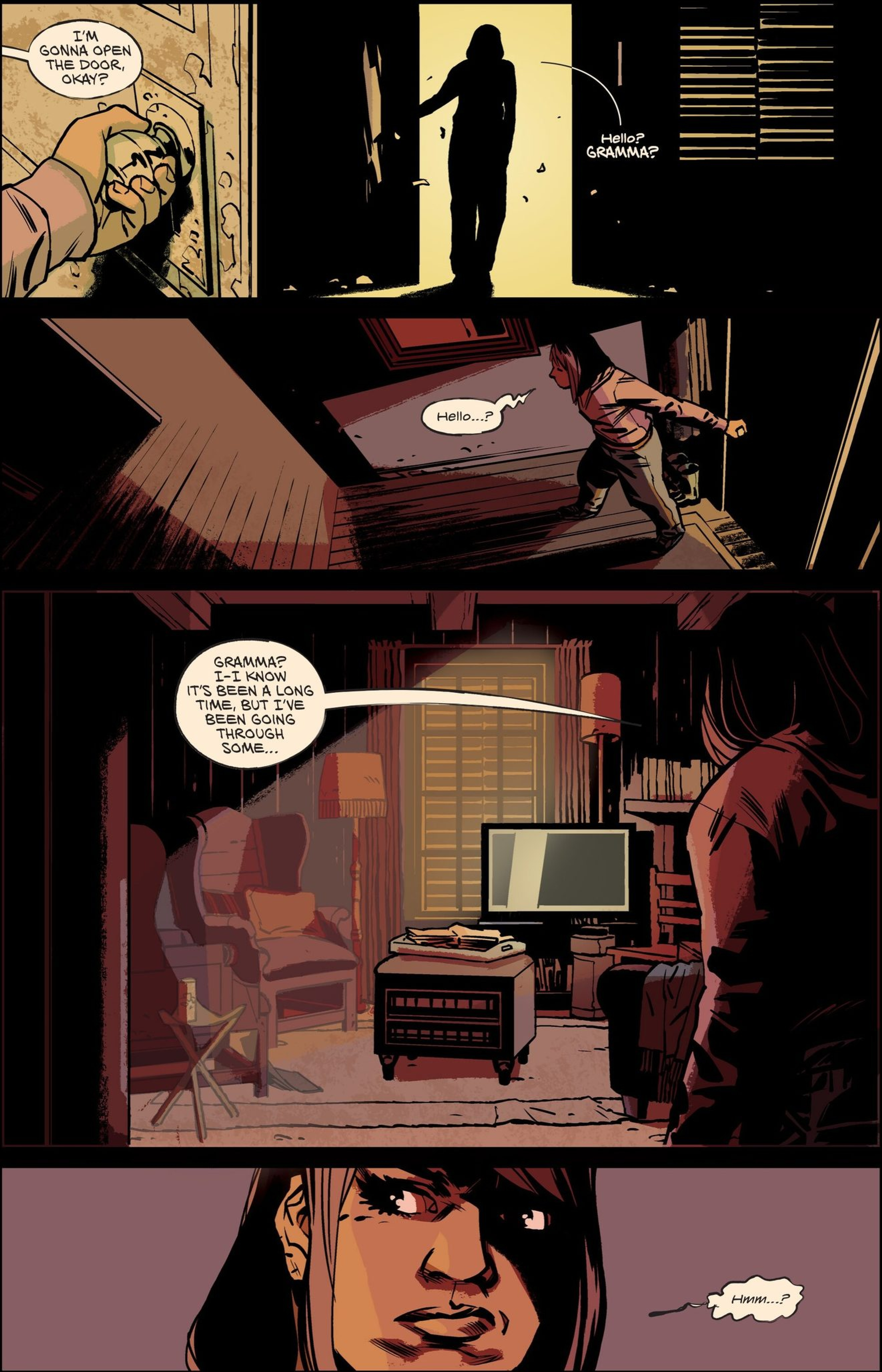

RAM
TOYOTA

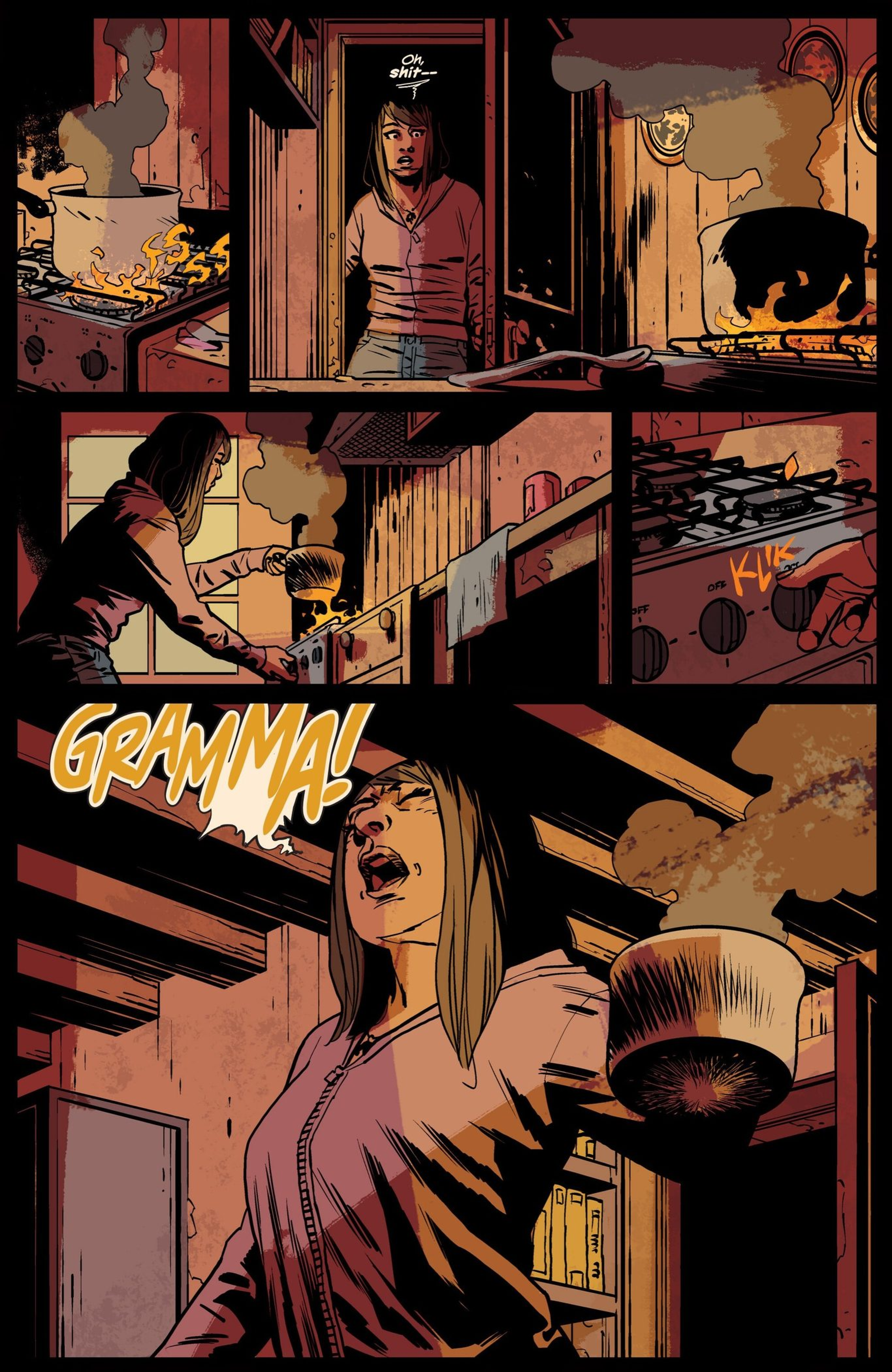

FOSSIL OIL CO
FOSSIL OIL CO

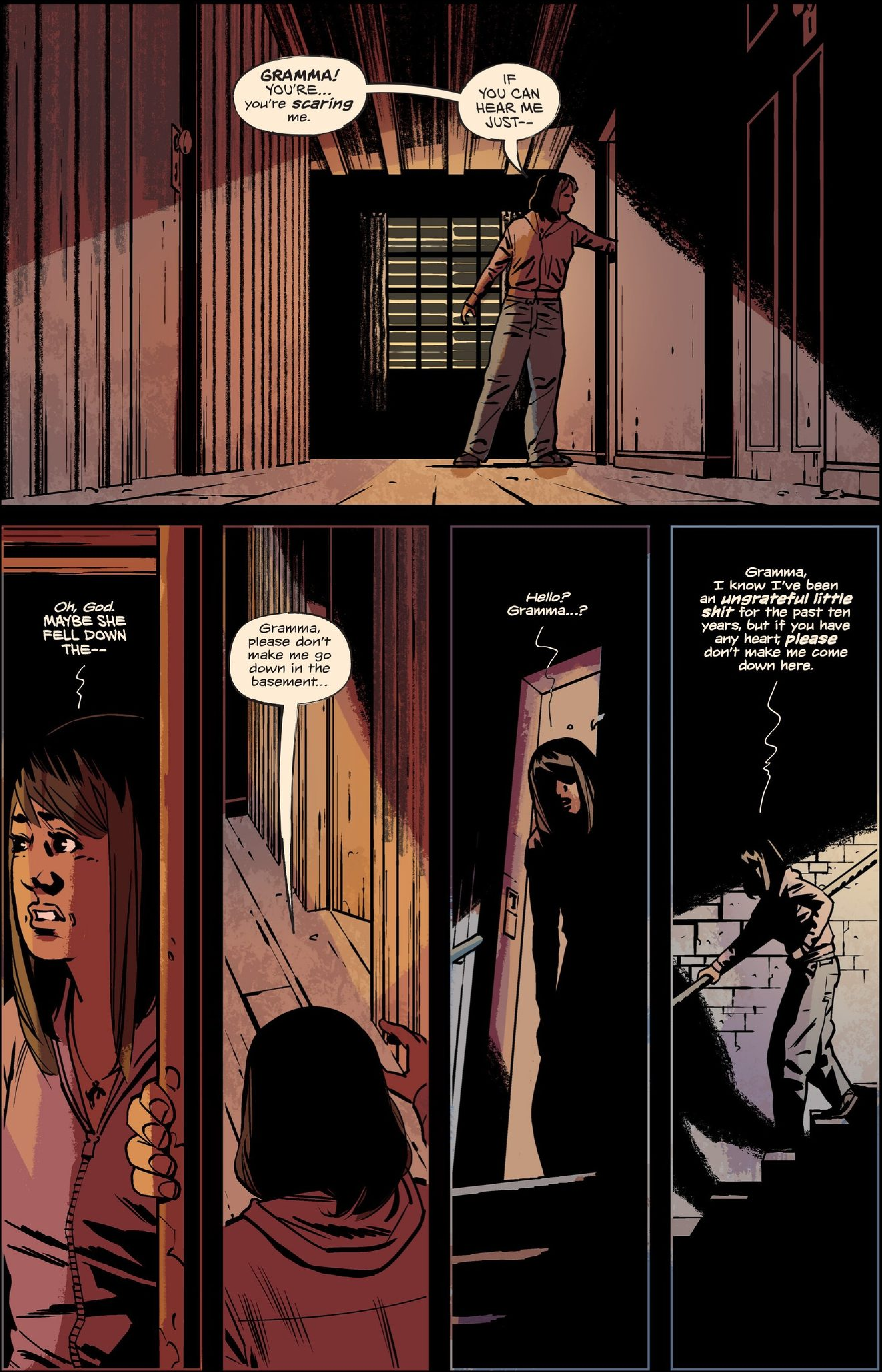

Well, THAT'S NEW...
KREE EEK

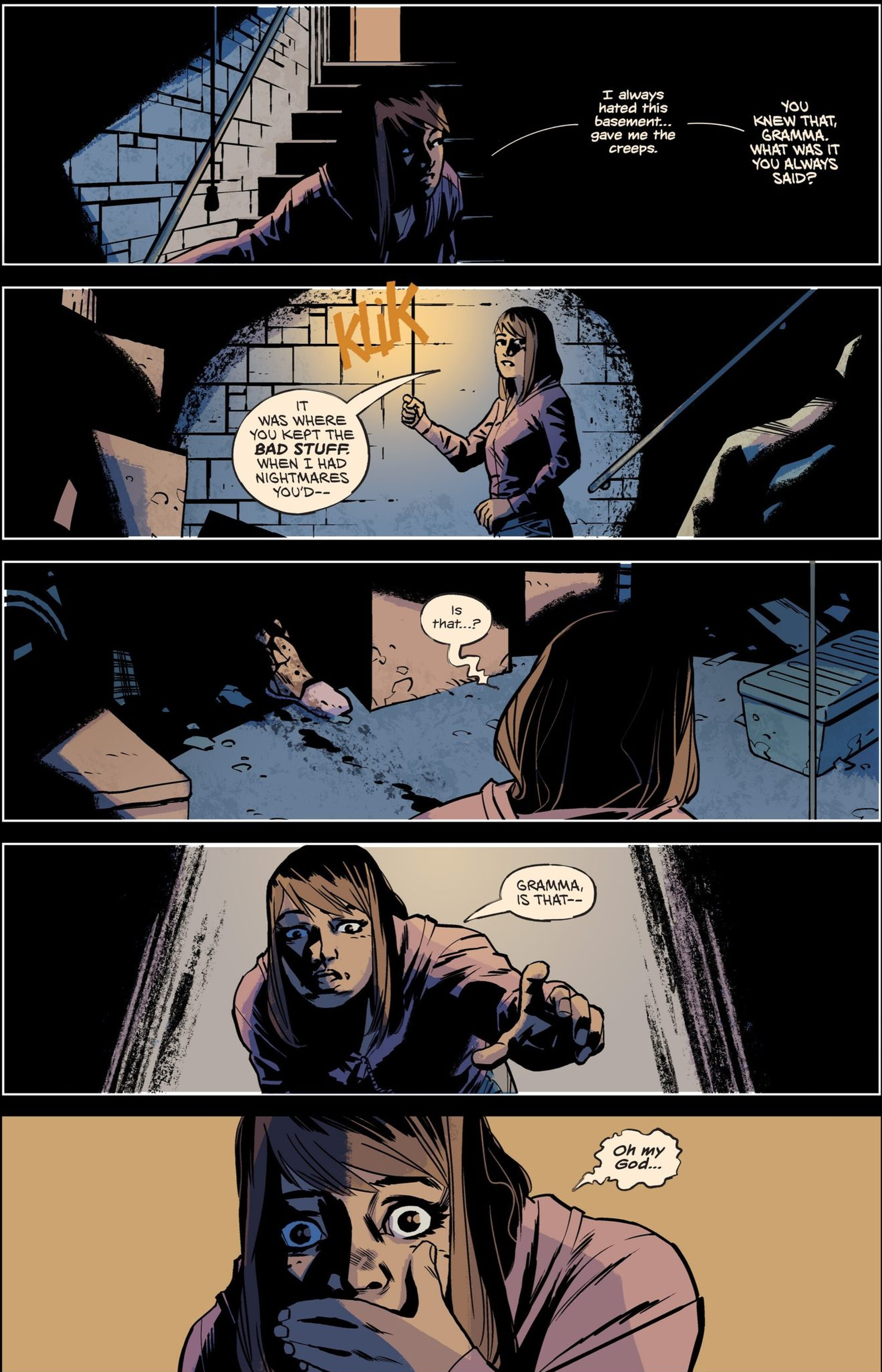

RRRRUUUUMMMMMBBBBLLLL
RUUUUMMMMMBBBBL
BBLLL*
What the hell...?
KREEEEK
KREEEEK

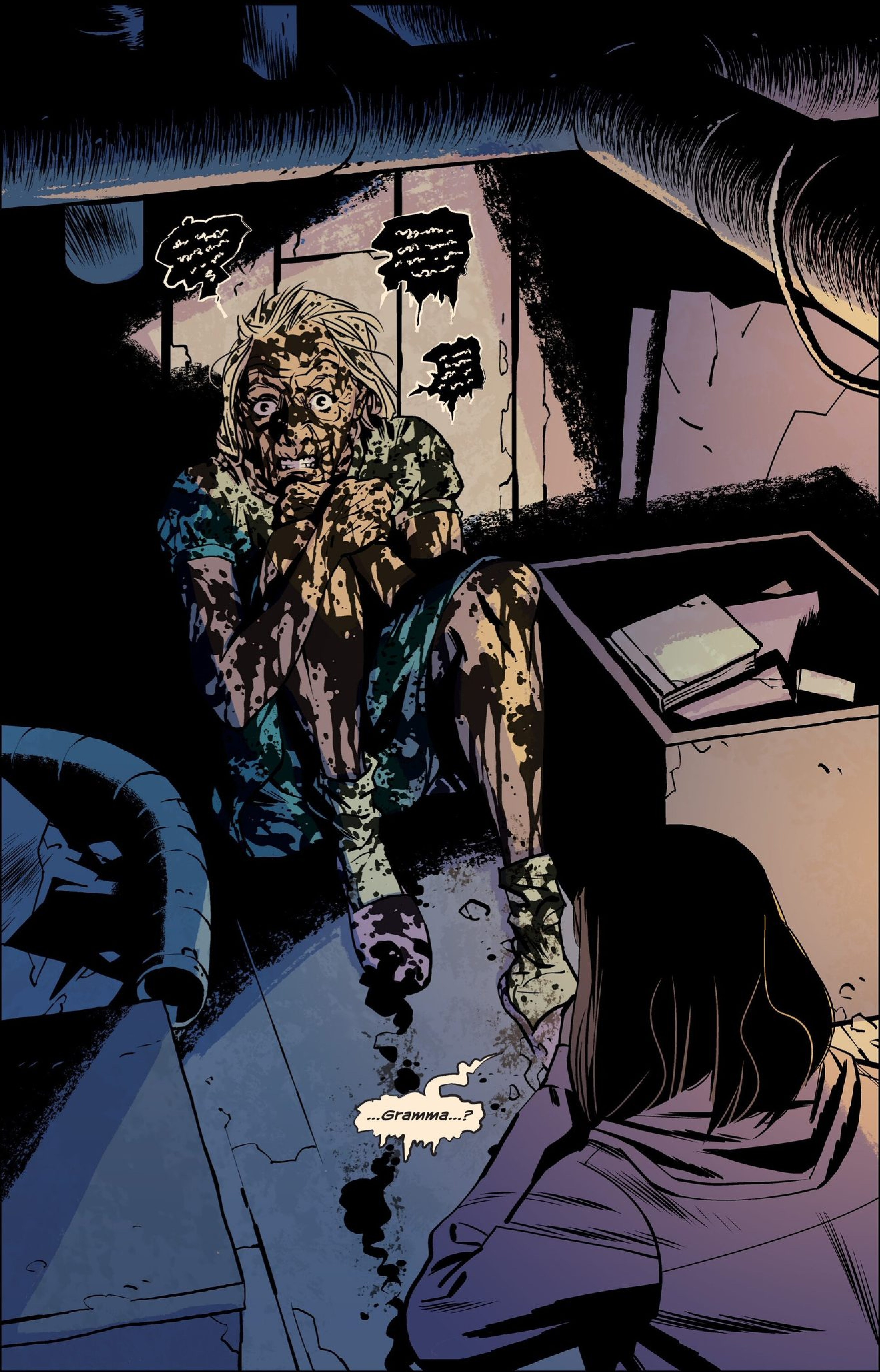

RREEEEEEEEE
NOK NOK
NOK NOK
GRAMMA! IT-IT'S TABBY.


I'M GONNA OPEN THE DOOR, OKAY?
Hello? GRAMMA?
Hello...?
GRAMMA? I-I KNOW IT'S BEEN A LONG TIME, BUT I'VE BEEN GOING THROUGH SOME...
Hmm...?


SSS
Oh, shit--
KLIK
OFF
OFF
OFF
GRAMMA!


GRAMMA! YOU'RE... you're ***scaring*** me.
IF YOU CAN HEAR ME JUST--
Oh, God. MAYBE SHE FELL DOWN THE--
Gramma, please don't make me go down in the basement...
Hello? Gramma...?
Gramma, I know I've been an ***ungrateful little shit*** for the past ten years, but if you have any heart, ***please*** don't make me come down here.


I always hated this basement... gave me the creeps.
YOU KNEW THAT, GRAMMA. WHAT WAS IT YOU ALWAYS SAID?
KLIK
IT WAS WHERE YOU KEPT THE **BAD STUFF.** WHEN I HAD NIGHTMARES YOU'D--
Is that...?
GRAMMA, IS THAT--
Oh my God...


...Gramma...?

Clean, Proven, Reliable
FOSSIL
OIL CO
Since 1888

I feel like I've struck oil. Well, creatively at least.

Of the Earth is a book that I conceived of some years ago, one that I saw as a unique combination of the Noir stories that I love with a desert-bound horror tale that would chill readers to the bone. Its origins were in an episode of an old radio program called *Quiet, Please*. There’s a great story called “The Thing on the Fourble Board” that an acquaintance of mine, Ken Daly, had mentioned while we were trolling about Burbank, California at Halloween time many years ago. He wasn’t wrong--it was great, and I recommend you check it out. I took a nugget of an idea from that and ran with it, coming up with something that was a cross between *Blood Simple*, *Tremors*, and *The Thing* --just what people have been begging for in the marketplace (see: sarcasm).

I often talk about a lot of my ideas originating years and years ago, often dating back to high school or college, and while *Of the Earth* took a few years to see the light of day, it was also an idea that I started kicking around sometime around 2020 or 2021 during lockdown. The scene that really drove me to write it was the roadkill sequence. I conceived of that confrontation--a compassionate woman wanting to care for an animal in its last moments while an unseen entity behind the wheel of a truck threatens her for some unknown reason. I thought it was extremely compelling. When I started writing that scene, I didn’t really know what the whole story was. But something was starting to form. A person on the run from their past comes up against… Well, *the past*.

While I liked the story fine, it really became a different beast when Charlie Adlard came onboard. I’ve been a fan of Charlie’s for quite a few years, of course. Who hasn’t been? I had gotten to know Charlie a little bit when I attended LICAF (the Lakes International Comic Arts Fest in the UK) back in 2021. I liked him immediately. When I eventually got to work with Charlie on two EC stories for Oni Press, it was a breeze. We got where the other was coming from quickly and felt free to express ourselves honestly within that collaboration. Charlie mentioned then that he might be interested in working together on something if I had a story. I just so happened to have one in my back pocket. It was this book you now hold in your hands.

You may also note that I am not the only writer appearing on the book. There’s a guy named Andrew Ehrich credited here who you may never have heard of, and that’s for good reason. Andrew is new to the comics business. I first met Andrew when we were working for Joe Dante’s Trailers from Hell in Los Angeles some years ago. We were sitting at Joe’s dining room table, going over the beat-by-beat breakdown of the next few months of TFH commentaries side by side. When we had a coffee break, Andrew and I started to

→

CONT'D

talk and we discovered that we had quite a few things in common. It wasn't long before we started to collaborate on scripts together. Andrew even co-wrote a draft of *Far Down Below* with me at one point. But why Andrew is on this book is because I trust Andrew's storytelling instincts. And I wanted to give him the chance to prove himself to an audience. I'm very fortunate to have a place in the industry now with many books already published and more on the way. But in my mind, I felt it would be selfish if I didn't try to share some of that success and bring the people I love to work with along with me.

We've been splitting duties and I'll break down how that goes. I wrote the first draft of issue one, then we alternated. He wrote two, I wrote three, he wrote four, then I wrote five. For issue six, we are going to split the script in half. While we've been writing these scripts separately, we've been revising together. So everything you read should have a uniform quality to it. I've never really collaborated with anyone like this before, but it's been a great experiment and I'm proud of the results.

I must also mention our other collaborators because this really is just an all-star lineup. We have the wonderful lettering talents of Hassan Otsmane-Elhaou. He's the best letterer in the business, for my money, and I am once again thrilled to have him onboard. We have Pip Martin on colors, which is quite fun, considering Pip got her start in the industry on *That Texas Blood*. Pip's coloring on this book has been phenomenal, bringing Charlie's moody black-and-white inks to life. And finally, last but not least, is our designer Michael Tivey. Mike has been working with me for nearly as long as I've been alive. I was excited to bring him onto *News from the Fallout*, and I'm excited to say that he's not just here on *Of the Earth*, but he will also be featured in *The Peril of the Brutal Dark: An Ezra Cain Mystery* as well as *That Texas Blood*.

I love this book. It's as much because of the story we're telling as it is because of the team I'm telling it with. I hope you like it as much as I do.

Oh, and be careful down in the basement. You never know what lurks in its shadows…

-Chris Condon

(END)

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Hi folks,

My name is Andrew Ehrich and it's a pleasure to make your acquaintance all the way out here in the dusty back country of Texas, where, as you'll come to find, something sinister lurks just below the surface… but more on that later. Being entirely new to the comics trade, I thought I'd take a moment to introduce myself and how I came to be involved with *Of The Earth*.

I'm originally from rural Minnesota but currently live in Los Angeles where I work as a writer. It was here, over a decade ago (!) when I first met Chris at a production meeting for Joe Dante's Trailers From Hell. Immediately recognizing a shared love of horror, science fiction and, most importantly, *The Simpsons**, we became fast friends and started collaborating on each other's scripts and short films. Reading early incarnations of *That Texas Blood* and *Far Down Below*, I was blown away by Chris's imagination. His ability to balance high concept genre storytelling with grounded realism is something I truly admire about his writing. And I still wait in eager anticipation to check out the latest draft of a script he's working on. He's got quite a mind, that guy!

TRUE!

A few years ago, he sent me his original treatment for *Of The Earth*, and I was immediately drawn to the idea. Channeling films like *The Thing* and *Tremors*, the story took your classic setup of a group of isolated characters in peril and gave it a fresh approach, specifically concerning the terror that pursues them. It felt like nothing I'd ever seen before. Add to this an element of *Blood Simple*-esque noir in our lead character, Tabby, fleeing a difficult past, and I was totally sold. So when Chris asked if I'd be interested in coming aboard as his co-writer on this book which would be drawn by Charlie Adlard (I mean, come on!), the only appropriate response was an emphatic yes. I've been a fan of Charlie's work for quite some time but to have the privilege to see him breathe life into our scripts is a sight to behold. Through his stunning visuals, he infuses every panel with a gritty authenticity that elevates the story into something truly unique and nightmarish.

So it's with an immense amount of gratitude that I find myself a part of this project. Being able to work alongside Chris, Charlie, Pip, Hassan, and Mike has been an absolute thrill, and I hope you enjoy reading this series as much as we've enjoyed creating it.

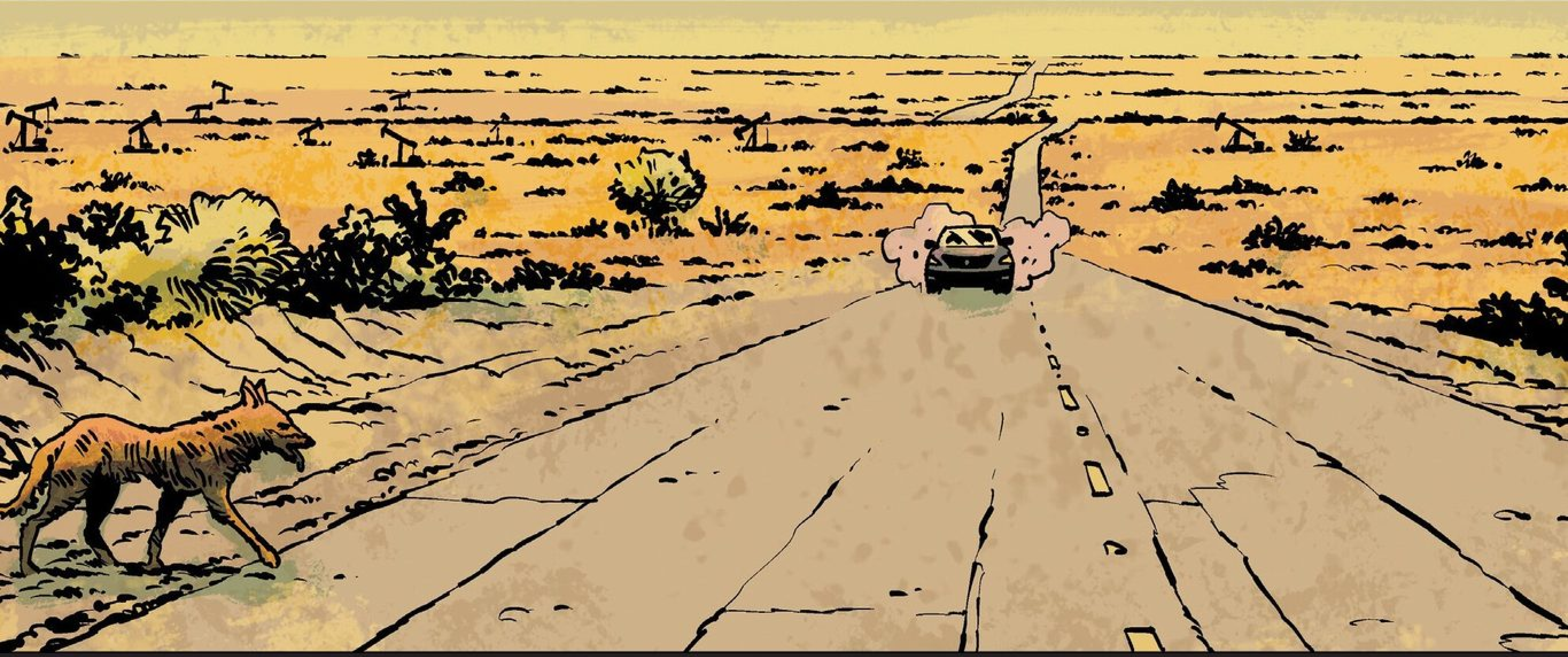
But a word of warning: if you happen to hear a strange noise or see a shape coming out of the darkness as you read, just hold your breath, don't move, and try to turn to the next page...

-Andrew Ehrich

Next Month

Chapter 2

Red Zone



CHAPTER 1

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